

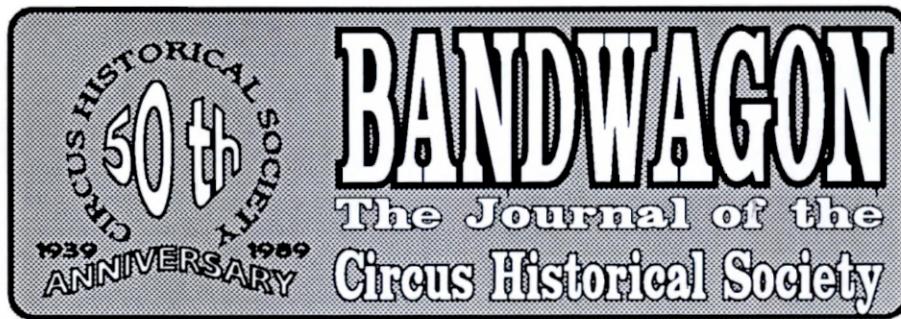
Biller Bros. Circus 1949-1950

# BANDWAGON

The Journal of the Circus Historical Society

September-October 1989





Vol. 33, No. 5

September-October 1989

**FRED D. PFENING, JR., EDITOR**

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**THIS MONTH'S COVER**

In 1945 Arthur Concello operated the 15 car Russell Bros. Pan Pacific Circus.

The opening performance featured Frank Buck, the Cristianis, Pallenbergs' Bears and the Flying Concellos.

A number of former Ringling-Barnum executives were with the show including Frank McClosky, Waldo Tupper, Bob Reynolds and Roland Butler. Butler's distinctive art style appeared in the Russell newspaper ads.

This illustration appeared in the center spread of a four page letterhead used by press agents Butler and Bill Antes.

**NEW MEMBERS**

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6634 Clybourn Ave. #58  
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South Acton, MA 01720

John R. Reynolds  
458 W. San Jose  
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209 S. Millvale Ave. #2  
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South Bend, IN 46615

Fred Bradshaw  
26 Charleston Circle  
Englewood, FL 34223

Eric L. Zelman  
12701 Bradwell Rd.  
Herndon, VA 22071

3534

**CHS ELECTION UPCOMING**

All members are encouraged to make nominations for president, vice-president, secretary-treasurer, and directors. Directors may be nominated only by members in their district. Fred D. Pfening III and Greg Parkinson have declined to run again for president and vice-president, each having served the traditional two, two year terms. Johann Dahlinger, however, is willing to continue her service to the society as secretary-treasurer. John Polacsek and Fred Dahlinger have expressed a willing to serve as president and vice-president.

Those wishing to make nominations should send them to Stuart Thayer, CHS Election Commissioner, 430 17th Avenue, Seattle, Washington 98112 before November 15. A ballot listing the top two vote-getters for each office will be enclosed in the November-December **Bandwagon**. The new officers' terms will begin on January 1, 1990, and the election results will be published in the January-February issue.

**NEW ADDRESS FOR  
SECRETARY-TREASURER**

Johann Dahlinger, along with husband Fred, have moved. Their new address is 1030 Chestnut Blvd., Chesterton, IN 46304

**AVAILABLE BACK  
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OF BANDWAGON**

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#### CORRECTION

The address shown in Jim Ridenour's ad in the July-August issue was not correct. His address is P. O. Box 10343, Sarasota, FL 34278.

#### SEASON'S REVIEW

The annual review of the circus season will appear in the January-February *Bandwagon*. To make it as comprehensive as possible, readers are asked to send photos, information, and clippings relating to the 1989 season to the author. Data relating to smaller shows, school shows, Shrine and fair circuses will be especially appreciated. Material will be returned if specified. Send information to: Fred D. Pfening III, 2315 Haferford Rd., Columbus, Ohio 43220.

#### CHRISTMAS ADS

The giant Christmas Bandwagon provides an ideal opportunity for CHS members to extend greetings to circuses and fellow members. The ad rates are listed in the masthead.

Send your copy, layout and check to the editor by December 1, 1989.

#### *IN MEMORY OF*

## *CLIFFORD E. VARGAS*

*CIRCUS HOST TO*

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PART ONE  
SEASONS OF 1949-1950

# Biller Bros. Circus

BY FRED D. PFENING, JR.

1949

**A**n entirely new show burst upon the American circus scene in the spring of 1949 which was similar to two other new circuses that had toured in prior years. The equipment was new as was the case with the Col. Tim McCoy Wild West show in 1938. It was also similar to Sam B. Dill's new Gentry Bros. Circus in 1930 as both shows made commercial arrangements with General Motors to use their trucks and provide advertising.

The first news of Biller Bros. Circus appeared in the November 6, 1948 *Billboard* where it was reported that the Stahlman brothers, Arthur, Hyman and Bernard, would launch Biller Bros Circus, named after Arthur Stahlman's wife Betty Biller, a former performer with Cole Bros., in the spring of 1949. The show was in the building stage in winter quarters at Lakeview Park, Mobile, Alabama. Early reports indicated that \$140,000 had been invested.

Arthur Stahlman aka Arthur Sturmak was born and raised in New York City and his boyhood vacations were spent in the sales field. His career started as an office worker with a firm on Wall Street. Although his legal family name was Sturmak, he used the name Stahlman when he joined the circus. At the time he was concerned about prejudice because of his Jewish background. The Sturmak family was prominent in New York, with his father being an elected official. At the time of joining the circus he felt it better not to use the family name. When his brothers were first mentioned in connection with the circus they too were referred to as Stahlman.

His first year with a circus is unknown. He worked as a butcher, usher and advertising banner salesman for Hagenbeck-Wallace, Sells-Floto, John Robinson and Al G. Barnes circuses. In the early 1940s he joined Cole Bros. In 1944 and 1945 he was



Arthur Sturmak, president and general manager of Biller Bros. Circus. Pfening Archives.

assistant superintendent of concessions on Cole.

Arthur's claim to fame on the Cole show was his ability to locate a supply of Coca-Cola in each city on the route. The soft drink was in very short supply due to war rationing of sugar. He was a good salesman and was able to arrange deals with the bottlers in each city, some of whom required a premium payment.

When Floyd King and Harold Rumbaugh organized the 1946 King Bros. truck show Stahlman was superintendent of concessions,

The cages purchased from the Ringling-Barnum show were no. 24 and 34. Van Matre photo.



a position he held through the 1948 season.

Biller Bros. Circus, Inc. was organized by Arthur Stahlman, and his brothers Hy and Bernie. Arthur was president and general manager. Hy, an attorney, was vice president and counsel and Bernie, an investment banker, was secretary. Executive offices were established in Hy's legal office at 3699 Lexington Avenue, New York City. The capital for the show came from the Sturmak family. Sturmak's father made a short term loan to the show, which was paid back during the season. The three brothers provided the remainder of the money, with the greater portion coming from Hy.

The next news of the Biller show came in the December 25, 1948 *Billboard*. Arthur Stahlman announced that he had purchased thirty new GMC tractors, following a conference in Chicago with H. T. Dehart, advertising manager of the truck and coach division of the General Motors Corporation.

Along with the sale of the trucks to the Biller organization, Dehart agreed to an advertising promotion tie-in, involving the GMC truck division and local dealers across the country. The deal was similar to one that had been negotiated with GMC by Sam B. Dill in 1930-31.

Stahlman also announced that he had signed Emmett W. Sims, a well known circus press agent, as Biller general agent. Sims had been with the Ringling-Barnum show the prior season and had worked with Stahlman on the Cole and King shows.

Other purchases announced at the end of 1948 included a modern up-to-date cookhouse valued at \$11,700 and two 60 k.w. diesel electric generators mounted on a semi-trailer built by Lewis Diesel Company of Memphis, Tennessee.

Stahlman said he and his brothers were convinced they would have at least \$200,000 invested when the show opened in April. At first, he said, they had figured on spending \$140,000, but it appeared the figure would be closer to \$200,000.

Floyd King was not happy about Stahlman taking out his own show. He had already seen one new circus spawned in his concession department in 1948 when Mickey Dales left to start his own show.

King later said that he felt Stahlman and his concession people had given him a short count on concession income in 1948. When the King show rolled into Rosenberg, Texas at the end of the season the concession trailer was missing; however, it soon turned up. King's often told story seems a bit odd as he

would hardly not be aware of the relationship with concession people after his many years in the business.

On top of starting a new circus in competition with King, Stahlman hired a number of bosses and performers away from King. Former King show people defecting to Stahlman were Emmett Sims, press agent; Doc Hall, superintendent; Enoch Bradford, boss canvas man; Walter Rogers, mechanic; Chester Gregory, side show manager; Tommy Poplin, electrician; Jack Bell, band leader; Steve Kuzmicz, advertising car manager and Joe Smiga of the concession department. King performers hired for the Biller show included Felix and Teresa Morales, Gladys Fox and the Cristianis.

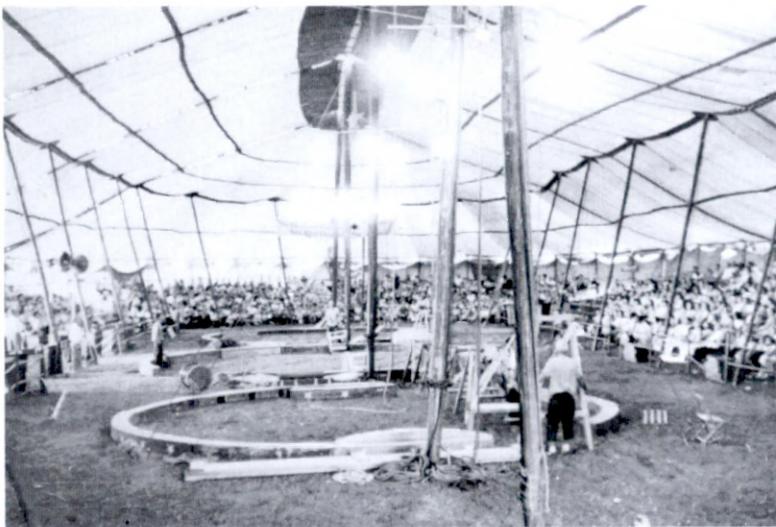
In late November of 1948 Arthur and Hyman Stahlman arrived in Mobile, Alabama and arranged for the use of Longview Park as winter quarters. The deal with General Motors to use all new GMC trucks on the show had been signed and sealed. GM diesel engines were also bought for the light plant. The trucks were delivered by the Robinson Truck and Equipment Company of Mobile, the local GMC dealer. Although most of the trucks were GMCs they were not all new 1949 models. Two former Army four wheel drive straight trucks were also purchased.

A contract was placed with the Kentucky Trailer Co. of Louisville, Kentucky, for new semi-trailers. A new 110 foot round big top with three 40s was ordered from O. Henry Tent and Awning Co. in Chicago. Also ordered was a 60 foot menagerie top with two 30s, a new dining tent and a dressing top. Considerable wardrobe was bought from Cole Bros. for the spec.

Arthur Stahlman also arranged a tie-in with Coca-Cola to furnish midway concession tops, an ice house top, the banner line for the side show and marquees for the side show and big top. For this the show agreed to sell only Coca-Cola.

Two elephants, Pinto and Wallace (one eyed) Modoc and two cages were purchased from the Ringling-Barnum show. The cages had been No. 72 and 83 on Ringling-Barnum in 1948. Three baby elephants were bought from Henry Trefflich a New York animal dealer. The three were promptly named Betty, Margie and Lillian.

After arriving in quarters all of the semis were painted yellow with red lettering outlined in blue. Each carried a logo stating "The Show that travels on GMC trucks." A nine high grand stand and twelve high blues were built in quarters. A former Army truck was converted to a mechanical shop truck



A full house at a matinee of Biller Bros. Circus in 1949. Pfening Archives.

with a boom on the front bumper to load the big top canvas. The big top canvas semi built by Kentucky Trailer had low sides allowing the lifting of the tent over the sides. An unusual semi was constructed for the Prince Ki Gor wild animal act, a five section cage with sleeping quarters in the front. A light two wheeled, three section cage was constructed for moving the lions from the semi-trailer to the steel arena.

In January of 1949 Stahlman sent for Jack S. Smith to come to Mobile to handle the Biller office. Smith was quartered at the Admiral Semmes Hotel in downtown Mobile, with lodging and meals paid by the show. Smith handled the office during the building of the show.

For some unknown reason Stahlman began using his legal name Sturmak in January 1949. References to him in the *Billboard* listed Sturmak, but a few times later the Stahlman name was again used.

Sturmak and his agent Emmett W. Sims were laying out the route for the season in the early part of 1949. Insight of how the route was determined is illustrated by a letter

The Biller big top canvas semi no. 75 on left and pole semi no. 65 in 1949. Van Matre photo.



Sturmak wrote to Charlie Campbell, a circus route collector and route card publisher, on February 1. He advised Campbell that he was interested in buying season routes of all shows except Ringling-Barnum. It appears that he wanted to see the towns played by other shows in the past as a guide in planning his 1949 tour.

An article in the *Mobile Press Register* of March 27 reported an investment of \$250,000 had been made in the show, with the GMC trucks and the Kentucky trailers accounting for \$130,000.

Gus Taliaferro and a number of concession people were hired from the Cole show where they had worked with Arthur Sturmak in earlier years. Following the 1948 season Zack Terrell had sold the Cole show to Jack Tavlin who brought in a number of new people. In addition experienced bosses came from other shows. Lorin "Doc" Hall, who had been general agent of the Bud Anderson show for many years before going to King in 1946, was superintendent. Walter Rogers, son of Ray Rogers, owner of the Barnett and Wallace Bros. circuses, was superintendent of mechanic and transportation. Jack Bell, long time with the Miller Bros. 101 Ranch, was band leader. Other bosses were Jack S. Smith, treasurer and office manager; Enoch Bradford, boss canvas man; Win Partello, superintendent of concessions; Dee Aldrich, side show manager; Chuck Taylor, cookhouse steward; Charles Pennington, cookhouse chef; Charles Haley, property boss; Tommy Poplin, superintendent of lights; Roy Bible, equestrian director; Scott Hall, announcer; Ed Bowers, superintendent of ring stock; Paul Hall, timekeeper; Ken Drake, chief legal adjuster; Gus Taliaferro, superintendent of front door, Cal McCarthy, assistant legal adjuster; E. Logan, superintendent of tickets and Joe Sullivan, advertising representative.

Gus Taliaferro and Arthur Sturmak were married to sisters Ritta and Betty Biller.



The Biller side show was loaded on semi no. 15 during the 1949 season. Pfening Archives.

Ellsworth "Slim" Sommers was named contracting agent and Steve Kuzmick was to manage the bill car. Fred Molton and Charles B. Schuler were hired as press agents. Virginia Schuler was to handle the radio and schools.

The show opened in Mobile on April 8 for a three day stand. The April 16 *Billboard* carried a short article on the opening, reporting the show had a three quarter matinee and a jammed night show with 200 standing. The night performance was a half hour late in starting due to the size of the turnout and a big party held in the wild animal arena. Invitations had been issued to Mobile business and political people to attend "the grand premier and gala opening preview of Biller Bros. Circus, America's newest and largest automotive transported show." A buffet and banquet in the "Lion's Den" was to start with cocktails at six p.m.

A *Billboard* reporter was on hand for the opening but a full report did not appear until the April 23 issue which read: "Mobile opening stand pulls big. Gets good weather, plays to 14,700 in first six shows, program well balanced.

"Built in less than six months, with everything new except some of the performers' props, the Biller Bros. Circus took to the road Monday (11) after a big three day opening stand at the Kelly Field lot. The route of the motorized unit will take it up the Eastern seaboard, probably into Canada. The plan is to play cities and towns heretofore missed by shows of its size.

"Motorized equipment, consisting of 41 GMC trucks and 29 Kentucky trailers, was designed by Arthur Sturmak in collaboration with other circus veterans. In design and weight, units were prepared for travel over weak and low overhead bridges. Reinforced trailers carry the heaviest of five elephants and vans carrying the poles are of extra length.

"The show also boasts of sleeping vans, equipped with

spring beds, and a commissary, complete to new refrigerators, capable of turning out 1,500 meals a day.

"The three day opening stand was greeted with good weather and an equally good turnout for the six shows. Only weather blemish was rain at 10 p.m. the

third night show, too late to hurt.

"Crowds at the first six shows rated the performance well balanced. Program went off without any delays. Roy Bible, equestrian director and Charley Haley, boss property man, were credited with doing excellent jobs.

"James Robinson, local dealer for GMC trucks, tossed a well attended cocktail party an hour before the opening night show. Besides city and county officials attending the affair, were F. J. Gale, president of the Greater Gulf Coast Fair; Mr. and Mrs. Al Wagner, of the Cavalcade of Amusements; Herb Watson, regional GMC manager; Joe Howell, Detroit GMC advertising representative; J. M. Grant, Jacksonville GMC zone manager and the entire circus staff.

"A. M. Thompson, photographer, made a complete movie of the circus in Mobile in behalf of GMC."

Biller Bros. presented a strong performance featuring a number of well known acts including the Cristiani cousins (Zerbini), Remo, Benny and Tripoli and wives Chata and Cosetta; Marion Knowlton, elephant trainer from the Cole show; Teresa Morales, aerialist and Prince Ki Gor wild animal act. Also appearing in the performance was George B. Hubler.

A special printed program was issued at the opening stand. It listed the following:

No. 1 United Nations on parade.

The Biller light plant was designed by chief electrician Tommy Poplin for the 1949 tour. Pfening Archives.



No. 2 Military ponies presented in ring-some and three by Hester Fernden and Roy Bible.

No. 3 Aerial acts over rings one and three by Ramona-Reynosa and Reggie Reppert.

No. 4 Prince Ki Gor lion act in arena.

No. 5 Clowns.

No. 6 George Hubler in center ring and comedy acts in rings one and three.

No. 7 Aerial ladders with Hester Fernden, Reggie Reppert, Ritta Taliaferro, Enrequia, Ricca Ramona and Francisco.

No. 8 Elephants presented by Marion Knowlton in center ring.

No. 9 Clown walk around.

No. 10 Center ring Ramona and Reynosa.

No. 11 Cristiani riding act in center ring.

No. 12 Concert announcement.

No. 13 Mario and Josefina Ivanov wire act in center ring.

No. 14 Juggling acts in three rings by Ricca, Enrequia and the Hublers.

No. 15 Clown walk around.

No. 16 Monte Carlo web aerial ballet.

No. 17 Teresa Morales, aerial gymnast over center ring.

No. 18 Cristianis tetterboard act in center ring.

No. 19 Second wild west concert announcement.

No. 20 Clown boxing match by Italo and Francisco Fornassaire.

No. 21 Menage horses presented by Ritta Taliaferro, Marion Knowlton and Jonil Stuz.

No. 22 Clown walk around.

No. 23 Liberty horses presented by Roy Bible in center ring.

No. 24 Iron jaw act over center ring by Francis Ramona and Reynosa.

No. 25 Aerial bar act by George Hubler and company.

No. 26 Tumbling and leaps over elephants by the Cristianis.

This line up of acts differed some from the program of the opening show in the *Billboard*.

The wild west concert included trick roping by Hunkie Johnson, Mexican Pete and Red Hovis; Swede Johnson, clown; whip cracking by Mable Johnson; roping by Red Hovis; sharp shooting by Mexican Pete and trick and fancy riding by Hunkie Johnson, Jane Hovis and Swede Johnson.

The clowns were Lou Rellay, producer; Delbina; Elias Taylor; Jackie Lynn; Papa Cristiani; Hello Cristiani; Uncle Cristiani and Bruce Taylor.

The band under the leadership of Jack Bell included Bernie Kenner, sax; Carmine Petraria and Karl Wahmund, trumpets; Homer Clark, clarinet; Jack Campbell, trombone; Louis Shaw, bass drum; Felice Gambone, baritone; Frank Thompson, snare drum; John Apolio and Alfred Depascates, bass

and Louis Johnson, air calliope. Betty Biller was band soloist.

Dee Aldrich's side show line up on opening day included Miss Ornella, ventriloquist with Punch and Judy; Irene Gaskill, double bodied girl; Eva Latour, snake charmer; Mary Webb, fat girl; Flamo, human salamander; Christine, alligator girl; Madam Zelda, mentalist; Prof. Cardo and Brown's minstrel show. A strong dancing girl blow-off was located in a walled off area of the side show tent. For an additional fee male patrons could see naked women.

Games of chance were also offered in the side show tent. The income from graft was an important source of revenue for the new show.

The April 23 *Billboard* also carried a box with the following question: "Did Sims quit?

"Chicago April 16. Rumors here today were that Emmett Sims has resigned as general agent of Biller Bros. Efforts to contact Sims or Art Sturmak, general manager of the Biller organization, for confirmation were unsuccessful."

The April 30 *Billboard* had further information on Sims. The article read: "Early going, since leaving Mobile, Alabama, winter quarters, has been tough for Biller Bros., Art Sturmak, general manager, told the *Billboard* by long distance from Harriman, Tennessee, Thursday (21). Then he added: 'Once we get out of this part of the country and get some good weather I think everything will be okay.'

"In the meantime, Emmett Sims, org's general agent, pulled into Chicago, his home, and announced he had resigned as the Biller general agent. He said he had so informed Sturmak and added, 'Under no circumstances will I return to the show.'

"Sturmak when queried on whether Sims had resigned, said, 'Sims hasn't resigned as far as I know. He's still general agent of the show. Emmett worked hard and needed a vacation. That's what he's doing now, taking a short rest, but I expect him back.'

"Sturmak said the three day opening stand in Mobile was okay, from an attendance standpoint, but since leaving there the show had run into much cold and rain and as a result attendance was anything but good.

"Tuesday in Maryville-Alcoa, Tennessee, he said, was light because of freezing weather. In Athens, Tennessee on the 20th, matinee business was good, but the night biz was way off due to cold weather. In Harriman on the 21st the show ran into rain.

"Sturmak said the executive staff was the same as that which opened the season in Mobile. Rumors that Dee Aldrich, side show manager; Ken Drake legal adjuster; Jack Bell, band leader and Fred Moulton, ad-

vance agent left or would leave the show were denied by Sturmak."

The first red one for the show came in Oak Ridge, Tennessee on April 22. The May 7 *Billboard* reported on this date saying the show had been the first to appear there and had hit the jackpot, with a full house at the matinee and an overflow at night. Weather was ideal.

A copy of the advertising car report for the Oak Ridge date in the Pfening Archives dated April 12, just ten days ahead of the show, listed the amount of paper posted. There were nine men on the car. On the country routes 479 sheets of date paper, 217 sheets of lithographs and 24 sheets of banners were posted. The in-town billing consisted of 115 sheets of lithographs and 100 window cards. A total of 504 passes were issued in exchange for this billing.

The show moved into Kentucky on April 23 at Middlesboro, where it had a three quarter matinee, despite a half hour delay in starting and had a better than three quarters at night. Weather in Jenkins on the 26th was excellent and business was good, with three quarter houses at both shows. The Biller show remained in Kentucky through May 4 when it played Flemingsburg.

All was not well with the show during its fifth week of the season. Jack S. Smith in a recent interview advised than working for Sturmak was entirely different than working with him on other shows. Smith had known Sturmak during their years together on the Cole show. Smith said he had difficulty working under Sturmak's management style. The generally poor business put little cash in the office to pay bills and the stress caused

The four wheeled trailer used by Biller Bros. Circus for downtown bally in 1949. Van Matre photo.



The modern Biller cook house kitchen was carried in semi no. 85. Pfening Archives.

Smith to leave the show in Northern Kentucky.

George Hubler and his acts left the show a week or so after the opening. A shortage of prop hands created problems in getting the net up for his aerial bar act. Hubler also recently said he had been assigned to a sleeper that also provided beds for the side show dancing girls whom he was shocked to see parading around the trailer undressed.

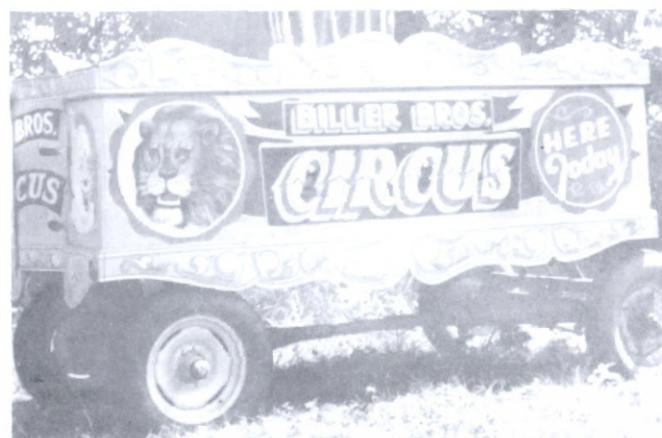
Early in the season when business was bad Sturmak met with all of the employees in the big top and explained that he could not assure he could make the payroll, but would fill their gas tanks and provide a cookhouse if they wanted to stay. Most agreed to stay, although many performers came and went during the season.

By May 5 the show was in Portsmouth, Ohio and the shake out of staff had begun. Coming north in the spring was always a serious problem for circuses at the start of the season. Bad weather, muddy lots and lack of business put nerves on edge.

The May 14 *Billboard* detailed the coming and going of the Biller staff. The article read: "Biller Bros. on upgrade, staff changes are listed.

"Biller Bros., which like quite a few other circuses had been experiencing tough weather, saw business improve this week in Kentucky and Ohio spots. Weather has been good.

"Art Sturmak, Biller general manager, said Dee Aldrich, side show manager, and his wife, who it was rumored are to leave the show, are still with it. Cecil Cooper, side show boss canvas man, has left. He has been succeeded by Pete Marsh. Felix Morales has replaced Roy Bible as equestrian director and Swede Johnson is in charge of the liberty act. Jack Smith, org's treasurer, left the show. He was replaced by Deedy Monarch, who joined May 2 in Frankfort, Kentucky. L. C. "Doc" Hall has been named general agent, re-





placing Emmett Sims, who resigned a few weeks ago.

"Portsmouth, Ohio gave the show a good days business, while the day before at Flemingsburg, Kentucky, the matinee was fair with capacity at night. Winchester, Kentucky proved only fair, Sturmak said, with Richmond, Kentucky average and Corbin, Kentucky was on the light side. A change of lots in Corbin hurt. Rain the previous day made it impossible to play the Bruce show grounds. At the last minute the show moved to the Skinner show grounds on the other side of the city."

The circus started a six day tour of West Virginia at Huntington on May 6. Dales Circus has shown there on April 25. Biller played Clarksburg on May 10. A copy of the sponsor contract, typed on yellow tablet paper in the Pfening Archives details the terms used by the show. The contract is typical of those made with sponsors during the season. The American Legion, Post 38, Gary, West Virginia agreed to furnish show grounds and water for the circus, without cost, on exhibition day. It was the understanding of contracting agent Ellsworth W. Somers, that the grounds were not to be situated within an incorporated area, therefore, no local or municipal license or permit was required to exhibit a circus. Biller Bros. agreed to furnish a complete and fully equipped circus including all personnel, animal displays, flameproof tents, lighting, all advertising and all other matters and things incident to producing an entertaining, colorful and high grade circus show. The circus was to furnish public liability and property insurance, protecting the city, lot owner, sponsor, and circus against all claims that may arise from any accident. The circus agreed to arrange with men selected by the sponsor to clean grounds after departure of the show. The American Legion was to receive twenty percent of the main show gross gate receipts, after deduction of Federal tax thereon. Settlement was to be made on or before 10:00 p.m. on circus day. The contract was dated April 14, only about three weeks ahead of the show date.

This tight booking indicates that the show had not started contracting the route during the winter months. This lack of contracted dates may have been connected to Sims

Biller sleeper no. 38 illustrates the attractive lettering on the 1949 trucks. The GMC logo appeared on all trucks. Van Matre photo.

leaving as general agent. It is not known if more than one contracting agent was working for the show.

By May 13 Biller was in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, followed by Washington. A Sunday jump took the show to Jamestown, New York on May 16. Moving fast across the New York state southern tier the show was in Danbury, Connecticut on May 24, where a tour of New England began.

The June 18 *Billboard* reported on the status of Biller Bros. It read: "Cold weather hits Biller in Concord. New Bedford okay."

"Concord, New Hampshire, June 11. Good weather, which favored Biller Bros. for two weeks, took a turn for the worse, May 7 and as a result business here was light.

"New Bedford, Massachusetts, gave okay business on June 1, the show doing three performances there when the opening matinee was sold out. Show officials said the side show managed by Scott Hall, had been experiencing a heavy draw. [This was the first confirmation that Dee Aldrich had indeed left the show.]

"Despite a recession in Keene, New Hampshire on June 4 where city records showed some 1,600 unemployed, the Biller organization chalked up two strong houses.

Lion trainer Prince Ki Gor lived in the front of this semi with the animal cages in the rear. Van Matre photo.



In Fitchburg, Massachusetts on June 3 show did light business, both shows attracting less than half houses."

During June and July the Biller show remained in New England going as far north as Maine and Vermont. Manchester, Connecticut on July 20 was cancelled due to a polio scare. The city health officer requested that the show not play the city. Show officials sought to make a last minute switch to Rockville but were unable to make it. The show did score a red one in Newport, Rhode Island on July 15 with full houses at both performances.

On July 25 Biller was in Glen Cove, Long Island, New York and played five more stands on the island before going to Peekskill on August 1. Hunt Bros. Circus had played a number of dates on the island in May, including Biller towns Glen Cove and Patchogue.

Louis Reed and Smokey Jones joined the show in July to train the baby elephants.

The July 30 *Billboard* carried a dressing room report from the Biller show. It said that a benefit show had been staged for crippled children of the Seaside State Sanitarium at New London, Connecticut on July 18 and it was a huge success. The performers and band members had been treated royally. Every one on the show had been shocked by the death of Tommy Ontko. Rose Barsock, side show vocalist had been hospitalized in Boston. Cletus Dennis, formerly of the truck and coach division of General Motors had joined the show as head mechanic, which suggested that Walter Rogers was no longer with the show.

The August 20 *Billboard* carried a report on the Biller show. It read: "Bad breaks cut Biller business in New York state."

"Liberty, New York, August 13. Biller Bros. Circus was snowed by bad breaks here on August 6 and played to half houses. Area caters to summer visitors from New York City and the polio scare kept most of them away. Competition provided by the finale of an Elks sponsored carnival and an American Legion air show in Monticello, 12 miles distant, and Lee Bros. Circus was playing four miles away.

1 DAY ONLY • SCRANTON • No. Main Ave.  
at City Line  
NEXT MON. AUG. 15

PERFORMANCES—2:30-8:15 P. M. DOORS OPEN 1 AND 7 P. M.

Read These Comments From Newspaper Reviewers:  
4,000 residents of Bangor gathered to watch the afternoon performance of this up-and-coming version of the "GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH." Two solid hours of first rate circus highlighted by lion tamers, excellent clowns, trapeze artists, bareback riding and many other acts necessary for a good circus. Robt. P. Vance in BANGOR (Me.) DAILY NEWS.

UNIONTOWN HAS A REAL CIRCUS. BILLER BROS. CIRCUS rates with ONE OF THE BEST ON THE ROAD. Everything about it is new, likewise many of its fine acts. Employees to a man are courteous, uniformed, business like. The visitor gets his or her money's worth.

THE WESTMORELAND OBSERVER, GREENSBURG, PA.

**AMERICA'S BIG SHOW** **BILLER BROS.** 3-RING Wild Animal **CIRCUS**

Featuring CLOWNS \* ELEPHANTS \* HORSES \* DISPLAYS

**50c** LOW PRE-WAR MATINEE PRICES **75c** PLUS TAX **ADULT**

SEE—Every STAR, every FEATURE EXACTLY AS ADVERTISED!

SEE—The HERD of BABY ELEPHANTS that made HISTORY when FLOWN to us by PLANE from BANGKOK, SIAM!

THIS IS POSITIVELY THE ONLY BIG CIRCUS TO EXHIBIT SCRANTON THIS YEAR!

TICKETS—Admission and Reserve Chairs on Sale Tomorrow at Reisman's, 414 Spruce St. (No Phone Calls) Eynon or Providence Line Buses Go Direct To Circus Grounds.

Biller newspaper ad used in Scranton, Pennsylvania in 1949. The ad quotes reviews from cities played earlier in the season. Pfening Archives.

"The show's luck was no better in Malone, New York on August 9, when scorching temperatures kept both houses light. Kingston, New York provided an exception to Biller's pull in the state. It furnished two full houses. Marion Knowlton was out of the show in Kingston, her home town, due to illness in her family.

The show was in Scranton, Pennsylvania on August 15 and then played five more stands in that state before showing in Hagerstown, Maryland on the 23rd.

The next day the circus was in Winchester, Virginia and was starting its move south to finish the season. Biller was in Henderson, North Carolina on August 30 and in Gaffney, South Carolina on September 6.

On September 20 Biller Bros. played Augusta, Georgia, followed by sixteen more stands in that state. The show went back into North Carolina at Statesville on October 10. Dates were played in North and South Carolina before showing Elberton, Georgia on November 4.

On November 14 Biller Bros. Circus

closed the season in Rome, Georgia after a tour of eighteen states.

The final *Billboard* report of the season appeared in the November 26 issue. It read: "Biller's final dates account for spotty business.

"Athens, Georgia, November 19. Biller Bros. Circus which concluded the 1949 season in Rome, Georgia on October 14, found business on its final dates on the spotty side.

"Organization, in its first annual tour, covered more than 11,000 miles before moving into quarters here.

"Dalton, Georgia, played November 11, registered a light matinee but a strong night house. Newman, Georgia on the 9th gave two light houses. Business in Athens was good registering two full ones.

"The organization lost one of its baby bulls on the last week of the tour. Cause of death was not established."

This final comment was not correct. In a recent interview Smokey Jones stated that the elephant, Betty, died shortly after the show arrived in winter quarters.

Arthur Sturmak, bannerman-butcher come circus owner, at age 35, despite bad weather and personnel problems had made it through his first season.

1950

The January 28 *Billboard* brought the first news of the year regarding the 1950 Biller show. A dressing room report appeared in that issue stating that horses, ponies, elephants, the wild animal act and show props had gone to Chattanooga, Tennessee where the Biller properties were used at a three day Moose Circus in the City Auditorium. Going to Chattanooga were Ritta and Betty Biller, Gladys Fox, Larry and Mary Carlton, Pete Marsh, Bob Allen, Dean Pearson, Prince Ki Gor, J. D. Clayton, Fats Revel, Buck Shurr, Smokey Jones and Cotton West.

Manager Sturmak had returned to quarters from an extensive business trip and had completed plans for the over hauling of equipment following its return from Chattanooga. On two prior Sundays the weather had been warm and on each occasion over 1,000 visitors to quarters to watch Ki Gor work the lion act and see Smokey Jones and Cotton West put the elephants through new routines. Recent visitors to quarters had included Hyman and Bernard Sturmak, Enoch Bradford, Tony Diano, Mr. and Mrs. Joe Hayward and Fred Logan.

Joe Bradbury visited the Biller quarters in Athens early in 1950. He provided a report in the March-April *White Tops*. He noted that Biller

didn't have too much work to do in preparing for the coming season. The trucks were still in excellent condition and did not require new paint jobs.

He described the winter quarters as follows: "On the right as you enter the fairgrounds is a large brick building where all circus properties were stored, such as canvas, props, seats and poles. Inside this building are complete carpenter, motor and paint shops. In another section of the building the two large and two baby elephants were quartered. Six monkeys were also kept there. A small cookhouse had been set up in another part of the housing. Parked inside were the water, ticket, winch and shop trucks.

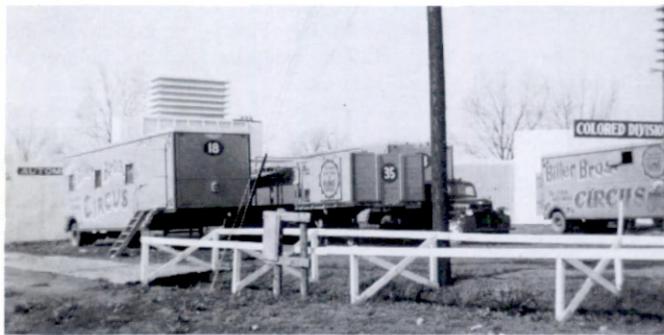
"Next to the brick building was a large stock barn, with another smaller barn immediately at its rear. Parked at the side of the stock barn was the dining department truck and a small four wheeled trailer bally wagon. The bally trailer was painted red, blue and yellow. During the season an air calliope was placed in it along with a few girls and clowns and it was pulled through downtown streets by a panel truck.

"The stock barn was divided into three sections with four rows of stalls. Each horse has a name plate over the door to its stall. In the spacious harness room the bridle and saddle of each horse had a hanger and name plate. About twenty-one horses and eight ponies were housed in the two stock barns.

"The cages and training rings were located in another part of the fairgrounds. Three semi-trailer cages were parked in the open with the side panels being removed in good weather. Two of the cages, with two sections each, came from the Ringling-Barnum show. The cages were painted yellow with red lettering and blue trim. Cage no. 24 contained one polar bear and one black bear. Cage no. 34 housed one lioness and on the road was to carry six monkeys. The third cage carried the Ki Gor lions. It was well constructed with living quarters and dens for five lions. The steel arena was set up next to the cage.

The mechanical shop truck with a boom was a former army truck and was one of the two non-GMC trucks on the show. Van Matre photo.





Biller Bros. trucks parked in the Athens, Georgia winter quarters in the spring of 1950. Bradbury photo.

"The quarters were open to the public with no admission charge. Nearly every Sunday a free show is given in which the bulls, horses and ponies performed.

"In the truck park the wonderful motorized equipment of the circus was lined up. The cookhouse truck was a marvel to behold and is the finest on the road. The tractors were painted black or green. The semi-trailers were painted yellow with red lettering and blue trim. Many of the semis had paintings of animals on each side. The trailers were numbered on the front with white numerals enclosed in red circles.

"Motorized equipment:

- Semis
- No. 10 Props.
- No. 15 Side show.
- No. 18 Band sleeper.
- No. 20 Wardrobe.
- No. 24 Cage.
- No. 25 Stringers and jacks.
- No. 28 Sleeper.
- No. 34 Cage.
- No. 35 Seats.
- No. 38 Sleeper.
- No. 40 Sleeper.
- No. 45 Marquee and seats.
- No. 48 Baby elephants.
- No. 50 Concessions.
- No. 55 Planks and seats.
- No. 65 Poles
- No. 70 Horses and ponies.
- No. 75 Big top canvas.
- No. 80 Large elephants.
- No. 85 Cookhouse.
- No. 90 Light plant.
- No. - Ki Gor cage.
- No. - Four wheeled bally trailer.

Straight trucks

- No. 32 Work shop. (Former army truck)
- No. - Office and tickets.
- No. - Stake body commissary.
- No. - Water truck.
- No. - Winch truck. (Former army truck)
- No. - Jeep mounted with stake driver.

"The circus used the regular fairgrounds office building. The costumes were stored in a room in the office building. Charles E. Schuler, head of the press department was in

charge of the office through the winter. Art and Bernie Sturmak had also been in quarters much of the time."

Bradbury met Arthur and Bernard Sturmak in the Athens quarters and remembered them as being dressed like New York society dudes in fancy suits, with Bernie even wearing spats. Their appearance contrasted that of other circus owners.

Sturmak hired Ken Maynard as a new feature of the show for the 1950 season. Special paper was printed featuring Maynard.

The circus opened with a two day stand in Athens on April 7 and 8. The *Billboard* covered the opening as follows: "Biller junket launched okay. Maynard draws.

"Athens, Georgia April 8. Arthur Sturmak's Biller Bros. Circus launched its second season to good returns and splendid public reaction at a two day engagement here under the Shrine auspices here.

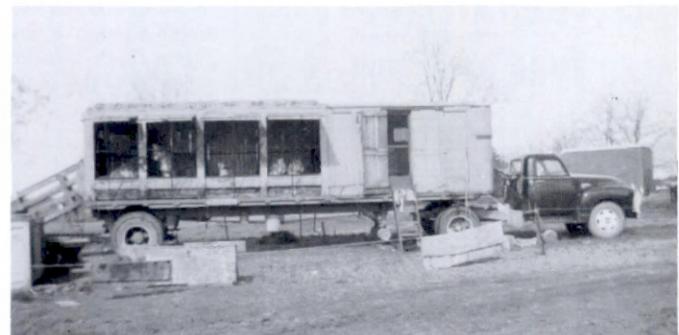
"Show's principal changes are in its enlarged midway with a 154 foot side show banner line, new-style novelty and concession booths and a new lighting system.

"Performance features the Cristiani troupe, holdover from last year, with Ken Maynard the principal concert draw. Maynard proved to be an excellent magnet for date here. More Cristiani family members are with the show this year, with Tripoli serving as equestrian director. Others on the roster are Cosetta, Chita, Benny, Remo, Pietro and Wanda Cristiani.

"New acts include Belmonte Florenz, slide for life; Skating Carltons (3); Dingler Duo, bar act; Borio Duo, wire; McIntyre Sisters, rola-bola; Florenz troupe on the wire with Belmonte, Flo and Grace McIntosh and Jerry Pressley and Logan brothers, trampoline.

"In addition to the Cristianis, acts from last year include Carlos Ricci, juggler; Prince Ki Gor, lion act and Francesco Ramosa and Reynosa, iron jaw. Elephants are worked by Marion Knowlton and Ritta Taliaferro.

"Hy Sturmak, Arthur's brother and a lawyer, has left his New York office to troupe this season. Bernard, another brother is on the advance in Canada. Win Partello is manager and Pete Marsh is superintendent. Menagerie top, a 60 with three 30s, is new. Big top is a 110 foot with three 40s. Joe Rossi fronts a ten piece band and Betty Biller is prima donna.



The Prince Ki Gor wild animal semi-trailer cage in the Athens quarters. Bradbury photo.

"Marvin Smith has a strong side show lineup. William Cowan is legal adjuster. Organization is staffed heavily with railroad show people this season.

"Opening matinee was light, about half house, but the first night's crowd was better than two thirds despite temperature in the low 40s. Sturmak was pleased and reported heavy advance Shrine sale for today. First jump calls for 160 miles of mountain travel to Asheville, North Carolina, and in a few days the show will be in Indiana."

Joe Bradbury was present at the opening. His report of the show was also published in the *White Tops*. He reported: "Easter weekend gave circus fans in Georgia a double dose of real circus.

"Biller Bros. opened in a two day stand in Athens, April 7 and 8, and King Bros. made their debut April 8 in Macon. Both shows wintered in their respective cities. In addition Rogers Bros. and Dales had already played stands in the state.

"Advance ticket sale was heavy. The show had staged an old time street parade two weeks previous, and frequent Sunday afternoon performances had made the local and neighboring population anxious for circus day.

"There is not too much change in the physical appearance of the show. Major change is the appearance of a menagerie tent and a larger and prettier side show banners. Big top is last year's and the side show top is a new blue one. Concession tops have all green and red canvas. Much painting has taken place, the cages were in the process of being lettered opening day.

"The interior of the big top has a neat, clean looking appearance. All seats and props have been freshly painted and renovated. A new lighting arrangement is used for the first time. Lights are grouped together in reflectors which give better ring illumination and a more 'showy' look. Grandstand is nine high, while blues are twelve high.

"Joe Rossi leads a good nine piece band with air calliope. The band had new red and blue uniforms.

"Menagerie tent (last year's side show)

housed three cages of wild animals, three elephants and about twenty-five head of horses and ponies. Only one of the original three baby elephants, Margie, flown to New York from Siam last year, remain. Betty died shortly after the show arrived in quarters and Lillian was sold to the Atlanta Zoo about two weeks before opening date."

A four page program was published for the opening stand. The folder was all advertising except for the performance listing.

The performance was listed as follows:

No. 1 Opening spec with all performers, lead stock, horses and three elephants. Introduction of Ken Maynard.

No. 2 Midget mericles of precise performing perfection. Shetland ponies with monkey riders in rings one and three presented by Ritta Taliaferro and Marion Knowlton.

No. 3 Center ring. Prince Ki Gor and six lionsesses.

No. 4 Swinging ladders. Four girls led by Grace McIntosh doing a revolving trapeze.

No. 5 A hilarious host of happy hooligans, the clowns.

No. 6 Unbelievable heights in juggling by Carlos Ricci.

No. 7 Comic capers on the bars by the Dingler Duo.

No. 8 Acme of aerial perfection by Francisco Ramoso.

No. 9 Chita and Cosetta Cristiani bareback riding.

No. 10 Ring one, McIntyre Sisters rumba. Ring two, Logan Brothers on trampoline. Ring three, Rafael Montilla, foot jiggling.

No. 11 Slide for life by Belmonte Florenz. Skating Carltons.

No. 12 Introduction of the unforgettable Hollywood cowboy movie star Ken Maynard and his wonder horse Trazan. First concert announcement.

No. 13 Wire acts. Ring one, Borio Duo. Ring two, Florenz Troupe, consisting of Belmonte Florenz, Flo McIntosh, Grace McIntosh and Jerry Pressley. Ring three, Josephina Ivanov.

No. 14 Kentucky Blue Ribbon manage horses on the track.

No. 15 Over the center ring Teresa Morales, single trapeze featuring heel and toe catches.

No. 16 Center ring elephant Margie presented by Smokey Jones.

No. 17 Center ring Cristiani Family tetter-board act.

No. 18 Clown boxing match by Fornasari Brothers.

No. 19 The aerial Ballet Russe, web number.

No. 20 Over center ring iron jaw act by Ramona and Reynosa.

No. 21 Burlesque wedding by the clowns.

No. 22 Second concert announcement.

No. 23 Center ring. Elephants Modoc and Pinto, presented by Marion Knowlton.

No. 24 Incredible leaps and somersaults through hoops of fire and over elephants by the Cristianis.

No. 25 Hippodrome races. Gentlemen jockey races; ponies and monkey riders; Roman chariot races and high jumping horses.

No. 26 Closing spec America.

After the two day opening stand the show made a long Sunday jump to Asheville, North Carolina, followed by Johnson City, Tennessee and then went into Kentucky at Middlesboro on April 12. A two day stand was played in Lexington, Kentucky on April 14 and 15. The Biller show was in Clarksville, Indiana on April 18 and played fourteen additional dates in that state, sliding into Illinois for one stand at Danville on April 23. The April 24 stand was in Lafayette, Indiana had to be cancelled after heavy rains made the lot a mire of mud. The show moved on to Kokomo the next contracted stand.

The April 23 *Billboard* carried a full report on the opening of the Biller show. It read: "Biller heads for old Cole route in Indiana.

"Athens, Georgia, April 15. Arthur Sturmak's Biller Bros. Circus is a bigger show than it was last year. There's more canvas, more seats, more employees, larger menagerie, enlarged side show and bigger advance.

"After the two day break-in engagement here, show jumped north to start playing the Cole Bros. Circus string of one day stands through Indiana, now that the Cole has moved into stadiums and baseball parks. Present plans also call for the show to go into Eastern Canada in the summer.

"While opening day's business was not capacity, officials were pleased by the turn out and the show got the 'nut' the first day, despite the many religious exercises on Good Friday.

"As is generally the case, the performance

Betty Biller Sturmak, for whom the circus was named. Pfening Archives.



Arthur Sturmak, on right, in front of the Biller Bros. Circus office truck in 1950. Pfening Archives.

did not run smoothly at first, but all problems were ironed out and the public reaction was excellent.

"Visitors at opening included Howard Y. Bary and Joe Hayworth, en route to King Bros. Circus where they will troupe this season; Lorin D. 'Doc' Hall, general agent last season, who is spending a few weeks with the King show before joining Ringling-Barnum in Baltimore in mid May and Paul M. Conway, Macon lawyer."

The staff of the 1950 Biller show was as follows:

Arthur Sturmak, president-general manager; Hyman Sturmak, treasurer-general counsel; Bernard Sturmak, vice-president; Win Partello, manager; Pete Marsh, superintendent; Tripoli Cristiani, equestrian director; Clem Emerson, office treasurer; Paul Hall, assistant treasurer; William Cowan, legal adjuster; Joe Rossi, musical director; Jimmy Gallagher, banners; Tommy Poplin, chief electrician; Dean Pierson, superintendent of tickets; Lee Parker, superintendent of reserve seat tickets; Charles G. Cox, announcer; Paul Hudson, transportation superintendent; Alec and David McIntosh, chief mechanics; Marvin Smith, side show manager; Joe Smiga, concession auditor; George Wagran, assistant superintendent of concessions; Bobby Lorraine, producing clown; Felix Brauzas, head usher; Gus Taliaferro, front door superintendent and John Wills, head groom.

The advance consisted of: James M. Beach, general agent; Ben Thomas, contracting agent; Pete Irving, public relations director; Charles Schuler, press; Virginia Schuler, radio; Jack Simpson, schools; Steve Kuz-



micz, advertising car manager and James M. Salter, 24 hour man.

Marvin Smith's side show had the following personnel: Charles Cox, outside openings; R. B. Robinson, tickets and second openings; Charley Pridemore, tickets; Robert Coleman, inside lecturer; Slayman Ali, front door; Tommy Mitchell, boss canvas man; Madam Rose, mentalist; Bozo, monkey man; Verna Mitchell, snakes; Pete Pierce and wife, impalement; Marvin Smith, anatomical wonder; Sue, indestructible girl; Wesley Upperman, half boy; Leatha, sword swallower; Paradise Hawaiian review, with Themla Symph; Lockwood Lewis' band and minstrels, with Pearl Farris, dancer and Ed Schearer, steel guitar. In the annex, Girls from Paris show were Peggy Moore and Kay Frances, dancers and Hanim Ben Ali, flagelet.

The May 6 *Billboard* carried a dressing room report. It stated that Marion Knolwton had been pinned under a horse and was out of the show. Gladys Fox was taking over the elephant and menage acts for her. Betty Biller was pinch hitting in the aerial ballet for Wanda Cristiani after the later's accident. Mr. and Mrs. Zack Terrell had visited in Evansville. Hy Sturmak was away from the show to drive his family back to New York.

The May 13 *Billboard* told of the show as follows: "Sun lifts Biller biz in Hamilton, Ohio.

"Plagued by inclement weather since the opening Biller Bros. Circus struck summer weather here on April 3 to register a half house in the afternoon and better than three quarter at night.

"One of the better motorized circuses, show seats 3,500 and travels on 36 units. Ken Maynard is the concert feature. Prices range from 90 cents for adults to 60 cents for kiddies in the afternoon and \$1.20 for adults and 60 cents for children at night. Side show goes for 30 cents. Rex Ronstrum, drummer, currently helping out Joe Rossi, will be with Issy Cervone's band when it starts on fairs for Barnes-Carruthers late in July.

"Visitors in Hamilton included John Robinson IV; Harry Anderson, of Enquier Printing Company; Charles Wirth, of the *Billboard* and Joe Sullivan, banner man for King Bros. Circus.

"In Fort Wayne, Indiana, May 1, the show had fair attendance at both performances, despite cold weather. At Richmond, Indiana, May 2, the organization pulled a half house in the afternoon and a two thirds at night in cold and rainy weather."

The show used an unusual courier. A sixteen page full color comic book was mailed rural box holders along the route. The cover featured Ken Maynard. The inside front cover and the back cover listed the acts on the show. Seven pages of drawings illustrated Prince Ki Gor. The center spread had seven photos of Ken Maynard. Two

erpool, Mount Vernon, Mansfield and Massillon.

Then came the due east route back through Pennsylvania into New Jersey. Ten additional Pennsylvania stands were played. The June 17 *Billboard* again told of the Biller show. From Scranton, Pennsylvania on June 10 the article stated that Pennsylvania had popped for Biller the prior week. The circus had played to big business at three spots to break the chain of weak houses that had plagued the show for weeks. There had been four capacity houses in the three past days.

They had packed the kids for a straw matinee in Scranton on June 7, aided there by a special 35 cents admission for youngsters and the dismissal of schools for the show. At the night show there was a good three quarter house. Hazelton produced two full houses on June 6. Another capacity crowd saw the night show at Williamsport on the 5th. Williamsport was home base for Prince Ki Gor, Biller's lion trainer. John Reasor had left that city to join out as a truck driver for Prof. George Keller a few years before. After watching Keller's wild animal act day after day he struck out on his own using the name Prince El Kigordo. The name was shortened to Ki Gor on the Biller show. Reasor had also worked with lions on the motor-drome of the Cetlin & Wilson carnival. It is thought that Sturmak purchased the five lions for his first act. The act was patterned along the lines of the Keller act and was not a fighting act a la Clyde Beatty or Terrell Jacobs.

The circus played two stands in New Jersey at Phillipsburg and Morristown on June 10 and 11. The next day the road to Canada started at Pittsfield, Massachusetts. Working north Biller played stands in Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine.

The *Billboard* of June 24 told of the current Biller activities. The article stated that the show was continuing to receive strong turnouts including a stand at North Adams, Massachusetts on June 13, drawing two full houses. The matinee performance in North Adams had been delayed about an hour due



This full color comic book was used as a courier by the Biller show in 1950. Pfening Archives.

pages offered various money saving coupons. Five pages were devoted to an illustrated story on the Cristianis. The inside back cover contained a welcome from Hy and Arthur Sturmak, with photos of both. Peter Irving edited the booklet and Arthur Soka did the drawings. It was printed in and mailed from Buffalo, New York.

The circus played two more dates in Ohio at Chillicothe and Portsmouth on May 3 and 4. The show then went in and out of Kentucky, Ohio, and West Virginia before moving into Pennsylvania on May 15 at Greensburg for seven stands. The circus showed Pittsburgh for five days starting May 17. No report was published in the trade paper about the success of this date. The show then played Wheeling, West Virginia and Washington, Pennsylvania and then came back to pick up four more dates in Ohio at East Liverpool.

The Biller midway showing the marquee and big top in 1950. Pfening Archives.



to the late arrival of a public safety inspector and a temporary shortage of workingmen. The circus had a full house at the night show in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania on June 8.

A dressing room report in the same issue mentioned Tommy Bentley as being on the show. Darryl Davis had recently also joined doing single traps and clowning. Marion Knowlton had left the show for a few days vacation at her home. Arthur and Hy Sturmak's parents had visited the show recently.

Gloucester, Massachusetts on June 26 drew better than half houses. The night show attracted a fifty percent of capacity house despite thick fog. At Lebanon, New Hampshire on June 24 the circus attracted two three quarter houses in hot weather. On June 23 in St. Johnsbury, Vermont the Biller show came in third place in a race for patrons. An annual Kawanis Club carnival had the biggest crowd and the New England baseball team fell just short of a new attendance record the same day.

Biller played Eastport, Maine on July 8 and then went into Canada at St. Stephen, New Brunswick the next day. The circus played five dates in that province and moved farther north to Nova Scotia at Truro on July 15. Sixteen dates were played in Nova Scotia including two day stands at Sydney, July 25-26 and Halifax July 31 and August 1.

While in the French speaking part of Canada the show used special heralds printed in French.

The *Billboard's* August 5 issue told of the Biller tour in the far north. Sydney, Nova Scotia had built from a half house opening to a near capacity crowd the final night. The matinees had been three quarters. The good business came despite the Biller show following Dailey Bros. in there by eighteen days. Two carnivals had also played the city within a month of Biller. The matinee in Sydney had been delayed until 3:30 p.m. because of a 174 mile jump from New Glasgow and delays in crossing the Straits of Canso on a ferry.

New Glasgow on July 24 provided a three quarter matinee and a full night house. Dailey

Biller Bros. Circus horse semi no. 70 in 1950. Pfening Archives.



Prince Ki Gor and three of the five lions he presented on the Biller show. Pfening Archives.

ley had also played that town. Members of the McIntosh family received gifts from New Glasgow towns people in observance of their first home coming since joining Barnett Bros. Circus in 1928.

In Yarmouth on July 19 Ritta Taliaferro escaped with minor injuries when her aerial rigging broke. She was treated by a doctor in the audience and was then taken to a hospital. A wild animal cage was over turned while the show was en route from Kentville to Digby on July 18. The water truck was over turned while towing an elephant truck on the move out of Yarmouth.

The two day stand in Halifax drew fair crowds and received favorable reviews but the rainy weather held business down. The stand had been sponsored by the Canadian Legion. A mix up resulted there for the city when it closed down several locally operated concession booths because they were located on property rented to the circus. Most of a \$2,000 clean up bond was returned to the show before it left the city.

Biller Bros. Circus headed back south playing four stands in New Brunswick before returning to the United States at Caribou, Maine on August 7. Five additional Maine dates were shown before going back into

Massachusetts at Haverhill on August 14.

The circus then played two dates in Rhode Island, four in Connecticut, two in New York and four in New Jersey. On September 1 the show was in Havre De Grace, Maryland. On September 4 it played Charlottesville, Virginia. After five dates

in Virginia the show went into North Carolina at Rocky Mount on September 9. Stands were played in North and South Carolina through September 30 when it was in Camden, South Carolina, the city that was to be its winter quarters.

The show ran into opposition in Virginia from the Clyde Beatty Circus at Portsmouth on September 13, followed by Biller on the 7th. Biller was in Suffolk on September 9, Beatty was contracted for the 15th. The Biller show was ten days ahead of Beatty in High Point, North Carolina.

The show had plenty of additional contracted dates and went into Georgia at Augusta on October 2. Seven stands were played in Georgia and five in Alabama before going into Mississippi at Pascagoula on October 16. Eight towns were shown in Mississippi. The show was in Rayville, Louisiana on October 25. Eighteen stands were played in Louisiana closing that state in Bogalusa on October 11. Three dates were played in Florida at Pensacola, Panama City and Tallahasse. Biller was in Moultrie, Georgia on October 16 and then played Fitzgerald and Swainsboro. Swainsboro was the closing stand on October 18. A 176 mile run was made to the new winter quarters in Camden, South Carolina.



The Biller Bros. Circus side show entrance and bannerline during the 1950 season. Van Matre photo.

The total mileage of the 1950 tour is not known but the extremely long season had taken the circus as far west as Illinois and as far north as Nova Scotia, playing in eighteen states and two provinces of Canada.

Nothing further was published about the Biller show until the October 21 *Billboard*. It brought the interesting news that Biller Bros. Circus was to have a short encore tour in 1950. The article stated that Biller planned a December date in New York City at an armory at 62nd Street and Columbus Avenue.

Arthur Sturmak advised that the show was preparing a major presentation for a two week stand that was slated to begin on December 26 under the auspices of the Knights of Pythias. Ninety lodges were to distribute 480,000 tickets to the fraternal order that had a membership of 130,000 in the greater New York area. The armory had a seating



Newspaper ad used for the New York indoor date at the end of 1950. Pfening Archives.

capacity of 5,200. Animals from the show were to be quartered at nearby stables. In addition to the standard Biller line up of talent new acts were being sought.

A contract had been reported to have been signed with the McLaren, Parkin and Kahn Agency to provide \$13,000 worth of advertising, with stress to be placed on radio and television. Sturmak was not sure at the time whether the deal would cover televising of the show during a performance. Billing was planned and parades were to be given.

The next scheduled indoor stand for the organization was to be in Providence, Rhode Island, where it was to be sponsored by the state wide membership of the Knights of Columbus.

In hindsight it is clear that the Sturmak brothers were taking their circus into uncharted territory, relying on an unproven sponsor in a very expensive city at a time of the year not usually associated with circus going.

Biller Bros. Circus opened in New York City on December 26 with a matinee at the 212th AAA Group Armory for a stand that was scheduled to run through January 7.

A strong performance was presented, but the show got off to a slow start with a half house due to constant snowfall and the first frigid spell of the season in the area. By the second day the pace quickened and owner Sturmak voiced confidence that would be the pattern for the rest of the date. With children home from school on Christmas vacation the matinee on December 27 produced a two thirds house. Night shows both days were sparse.

The armory was located not far from the

city center and had an approximate seating capacity of 4,400, nearly a thousand less than Sturmak had earlier stated. Ticket prices were \$1.50 and 75 cents in the afternoon and \$3.30 and \$1.50 at night. On Saturdays, Sundays and New Year's Day matinee prices were \$2 and \$1.

Sturmak had signed a five year contract with the Knights, and had great hope of making the show an annual Christmas fixture. He reported officials of the Knights evinced satisfaction with the deal on the basis of the first two days of the stand.

Concession business, handled by the show, went well considering the size of the turnouts. The show received a large amount of publicity by way of both television and newspapers. The *New York Times* gave the circus nearly a column long story, but the head and lead stated that stand was to be three weeks rather than two. The *World Telegram and Sun* and the *Herald Tribune* also provided ample space and photos. Charles Schuler had handled the press and had done a good job. The advertising agency had purchased large amounts of newspaper ads and the city had been liberally papered.

The show ran approximately two and a half hours. The majority of the features were well known, but the program was changed considerably from the one presented under canvas the prior summer.

The performance was as follows:

No. 1 Prince Ki Gor, working six lionesses in the center ring.

No. 2 Over the center ring. Anteleks, aerial bar act. Over the end rings were Helen Wolthing with cloud swing and Grace McIntosh on the aerial bar. Followed by Belmonte Florenz's foot slide.

No. 3 Clown walk around.

No. 4 Mme. Torelli's dogs and ponies in center ring, flanked by Lorretta and Vernon Colbert and the Gonzales Sisters with dogs.

No. 5 Six Bonginos risley act in center ring, flanked by Tommy and Betty Pariss and the Three Alivions on trampolines.

No. 6 Over center ring. Vander Barbette Girls, Pat O'Reilly Williams, Betty Paterson, Norma Wright and Zahra Kader, revolving aerial ballet and iron jaw number, using a special rigging used on the Cole show in 1950. Sylvia Gregory and Conchita did iron jaw routines over the end rings.

No. 7 Clown number.

No. 8 Center ring. Five Anteleks perch pole balancing, featuring two members working heel catches and another a handstand for the finale.

No. 9 Florenz Troupe (4) wire walking in ring one and Don Francisco, tight and slack wire wire in ring three.

No. 10 Andrex, cloud swing over center ring, flanked by Teresa Morales, aerial heel and toe catches, and Francine Volante, cloud swing with break away finale.

No. 11 Center ring. Yacopis, tetterboard and perch.

No. 12 Triska Troupe (4) high wire over ring one.

No. 13 Two Zellharts, individual sway poles in ring three.

No. 14 Biller Girls Aerial Ballet (8), web number.

No. 15 Helen Haag and chimps in center ring.

No. 16 Clown number,

No. 17 Mme. Torelli liberty horses in center ring. Capt. Loran Edwards liberty horses in ring three.

No. 18 Ericksons (5), tetterboard in center ring, flanked by Jim Marks and Company, trick bike act in ring one and Freddy and Helen Wolthing unicycle act in ring three.

No. 19 Elephants, presented by Marion Knowlton, in center ring.

No. 20 Clowns.

No. 21 Flying Hartzells (4) trapeze over center ring.

Both Marion Knowlton, who worked the show's elephant ballet and Le Blonde, aerial bars, were unable to work on December 27. Marion had a sprained ankle and Le Blonde had a heavy cold.

Production credits went to the Sturmak brothers, while Vander Barbette executed the staging. Joe Rossi and his band supplied the music. Peter Gerry was vocalist and Charles G. Cox did the announcing.

The *Billboard* of January 13, 1951 reported that all was not going well with the Biller show during its invasion of Gotham. It stated the stand was to be cut by six days and the acts were waiting to be paid. The show closed early on January 1. Arthur Sturmak reported that all salaries except those of the performers had been paid and that arrangements between management and the American Guild of Variety Artists would take care of the omission. On January 2 he claimed that the talent would stick with the show for a date in Providence to begin January 7, under the sponsorship of the Knights of Columbus. The Rhode Island committee reported that the advance sale there practically guaranteed making the nut.

It was reported that the AGVA would have a tight financial rein on the Providence operation. The Knights of Columbus had guaranteed to pay enough cash to cover the performers salaries. There was also a possibility of pressure by the union on the national Knights of Pythias group to pay the acts a week's wages for the New York run on the grounds of "moral obligation."

The New York foray had clearly been a total disaster for the Sturmak brothers. Arthur was quick to attempt to lay the failure off on the sponsor. He charged that the Knights of Pythias had failed to provide the show management with the necessary operating capital called for in the contract between the show and the Knights. He stated he had delivered an ultimatum New Year's Eve to the committee that he would yank the show unless money was forthcoming and

had received no action on the demand. The closing was the result. Sturmak claimed that the circus was out \$50,000 due to the fiasco, of which \$20,000 was blown on advertising. Sturmak beefed that the pact between the Knights and the show assured the organization of \$5,000 daily for the show itself and \$2,000 daily for advertising, making a total of \$91,000 for the thirteen day run. He said the committee claimed ticket sales of 40,000, but business for the aborted run was below par, with the bulk of the patronage coming in the afternoons. Only twenty percent of the admissions were accounted for by box office sales. The money due talent was to have been supplied by the Knights under the terms of the contract, he claimed.

Despite the inauspicious local start, Sturmak said he hoped to bring the show back to New York, but definitely not with the same sponsor. The run taught him there was too much outside activity for a circus to draw well during the end of the year holidays.

A spokesman for the Knights responded with their side of the story, saying that the pact between the parties made the society liable only for renting the armory and defraying ticket printing expenses. He claimed that the agreement stipulated the proceeds from the stand were to have been split evenly between the show and the society. Rental on the armory was \$5,700 and \$4,800 of that figure already had been paid. He indicated that the Knights might have to go into their own pockets to cover part of the ticket printing cost.

Being the slick and resourceful operator that he was Sturmak was able to take the show to Providence despite the entanglement with the AGVA over pay due for the New York stand.

The show opened as scheduled, sponsored by the Knights of Columbus, at the Cranston Street Armory on January 8 with a fair sized evening house. The talent line up for the stand in Providence was the same as the New York run.

When the fuss over performers' pay started in New York the prior week, the AGVA notified the K. of C. that the circus would not show in Providence. The K. of C. committee then wired \$2,000 to New York to provide transportation and expenses for the performers to make sure the show would arrive.

When the circus did arrive it was threatened with attachment. The New York advertising agency wanted \$30,000 from the circus management and prepared to take all receipts. The agency had paid for the circus newspaper and television advertising. Following this turn, spokesmen for the show, AGVA and the K. of C. went before a Superior Court judge asking that the circus be placed under a protective temporary receivership which restrained creditors from suing or attaching it.

Minor misfortune was added when an

electrical fuse blew in the armory on opening night, crippling the floodlight system. Portable spotlights were substituted. Another hitch cropped up when it was found necessary to build a ramp to bring the show animals from their basement quarters through a side door into the armory. The ramp was not finished in time for the initial performance, so the beasts remained in the basement.

The circus had taken ample advertising space in the *Providence Journal*. In a tie-in with the *Journal* the paper ran coupons at the bottom of the ads. The coupons and fifty cents admitted children to the matinees, while the coupon and sixty cents entitled the kids under twelve to an evening show when accompanied by an adult. The regular ticket prices were \$1.20 and 60 cents for children at the matinees.

The January 27 *Billboard* carried an extensive article on the trials and tribulations of the Biller show in the Northeast. The show had started slow in Providence but gained ground by the 11th and wound up playing to turn away houses. But legal snafus had hit it on opening day and were continuing. On January 17 George I. Cohen, attorney for the show, stated that a petition had been filed in United States District Court in New York to place the circus in bankruptcy.

Walter J. Hennessey, temporary receiver, reported to the court that he had collected \$17,461.24, including a loan of \$5,000 from Hugo H. and Mary D. Lennon, of Providence. The loan was said to have been made to get the show open. Hennessey said he had paid out \$17,420.77, of which \$2,475 was a repayment to the Lenons. A balance of \$40.47 was reported. The Superior court judge awarded Hennessey a \$2,500 receiver's fee, which together with the balance owed the Lenons, were to be preferred claims against the show's assets in Providence. Assets included three elephants and two semi-trailer trucks. The circus owners agreed to meet feed bills for the elephants, which had reached \$125.25. Snow and mechanical difficulties were added to Biller problems. But the weather had cleared by the 9th and remained good until the matinee on the 14th.

A committee of five show members, Arthur Sturmak, co-owner of the circus, and a K. of C. representative met on January 7 and negotiated until the 10th over the salary set up for both New York and the stand in Providence. It was finally agreed that the performers' salaries would be distributed daily. The plan was carried out through the Providence run, and the acts received all money coming to them for the stand. The matter of cash due for the New York date was yet to be settled.

Although the K. of C. generally evinced satisfaction in the final result, the K. of C. chairman was less enthusiastic. He said he would like to work with another circus in Providence, if it was under different management.

On January 18 a New York Federal Dis-

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The Biller Bros. Circus newspaper ad used in Providence, Rhode Island in January of 1951 listed the Flying Hartzells; Helen Haag's chimps; Belmonte, foot slide; the Anteileks; the Yacopis; the Ericksons and Torelli's liberty horses. Pfening Archives.

trict Court allowed a petition for arrangement for reorganization that insured that all equipment and properties of the show would remain under the control of Arthur and Hyman Sturmak. All creditors would be restrained from attempting to sue or attach the circus. Hy Sturmak said the total amount owed was in the neighborhood of \$20,000. Arthur guaranteed that all pay due the talent for the New York stand would be made good.

Under terms of the petition 100 percent of the show's indebtedness would be paid off at the rate of twenty-five percent a year for the following four years.

On February 1 Hy Sturmak announced that all show creditors had agreed to the plan whereby the total indebtedness would be paid off during the following four years.



# Tracy Heaston at the Calliope

## *The Artist:*

Tracy Heaston has been involved with music and the circus since he was a small child. He played the calliope for the first time under Merle Evans at age 11 when the Ringling Brothers Circus came to Los Angeles in 1969. Tracy has a B.A. in percussion instruments. He has been featured in many parades, circuses, and fairs, on radio commercials, in two movies, and in many other promotions. He is noted for his feather touch on the calliope.

## *The Calliope:*

Calliopes were originally steam pressured instruments in which each valve released steam to a different sounding pipe. Tracy's calliope was first purchased for a river boat, The Cotton Blossom, and has been rebuilt and put back into service operated now by a gas powered blower. Very few of these rare instruments are still in existence. They are used today only on special occasions and expositions.

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Short Sketches  
Of Former Shows

# CARD BROS. CIRCUS

By Joseph T. Bradbury

**C**ard Bros. Circus, a small motorized show using a half dozen vehicles, made limited tours in 1934, 1935 and 1936. The show was organized and operated by Randall T. Card near Coventry, Rhode Island.

In 1934, its first year, the show was titled R. T. Card's Dog and Pony Show. The show carried around two dozen people and four ponies. Carl Woolrich led a three piece band. The two poled big top was an old one with lots of patches that were not the same

eral photos. Randall T. Card was pictured with another photo showing the big top, several vehicles and a troupe of performing ponies.

The late John Cutler, a well known New England circus fan, sent me a copy of the Card newspaper article about twenty years ago. Although Cutler photographed many circuses in the 1930s he evidently never took any photos of the Card show.

The *Evening Bulletin* article describes the Card Bros. winter quarters as it appeared just

The author soon cornered the show's owner, who he described as a seventy-six year old backwoods Barnum, and the interview began. With Mr. Card was his large rhesus monkey, Jennie, which was a featured performer in the program.

"Now then, about this circus of mine. I've always had a hankering to have a show and two years ago I began getting one together. Far as I know, it's the first Rhode Island owned circus since I was a boy. There was a fellow named Archie Stawker who had a sort

of entertainment garden on Washington Street in Providence. One year, he came out with Stawker's New England Circus and made quite a thing of it. Later, he went down New Jersey way and went into the catering business. Since then, until last season when I was with my show, all of the circuses that have come into Rhode Island have been owned outside. [Although he was not a native of the state, Harry S. Palmer organized Lincoln Bros. Circus in 1921

at Pawtucket, Rhode Island. The Lincoln show was medium size overland show moving entirely by equine power. An article on Lincoln Bros. appeared in the November-December, 1971 *Bandwagon*.]

"Show business always has interested me, and I've been in it off and on since I was a young man. My first job, when I was seven, was in John Jencks Kilton's mill in Washington, where I was born in 1859. I worked in mills here and there for quite a spell.

"My mother's second husband first got me interested in shows. He was Prof. Potter, a sleight-of-hand performer, who used to travel around with Prof. Ben Sweet, who was a water-walker. Sweet used to put pontoons on his feet and walk across ponds. I remember seeing him walk across the old Providence Cove once.

"After going around with the professors for a while, I got a little show of my own, a



color as the original tent. Photos suggest that the big top may have been a sixty foot round top with one thirty foot middle.

Throughout its three year existence the show played in southern New England. Although plans were announced that the show would play a more extensive route all known dates were in Rhode Island, Connecticut and Massachusetts.

The show played very small towns and seldom published its route. Very few photos exist of the show. Some of the circus fans in the area may have seen it but no photos have turned up. Much of the information recorded here came from an article published in the Providence, Rhode Island *Evening Bulletin* on July 5, 1935.

The excellent article was written by Garrett D. Byrnes and was headed: "Only R. I. Circus starts second season on road." "Rhody's home grown Circus" appeared over sev-

Group photo of the R. T. Card Dog & Pony Show, taken by Edward J. Kelty in 1934. A sleeper bus is at right and the concession trailer is at left with the big top in the background. Jack Bard, in straw hat, general agent, is fifth from right. At his right is Randall T. Card, in cap. Pfening Archives.

before the show went on the road for the 1935 season: "From the door of the carriage house, which is on the old Salisbury farm in the back woods north of Coventry village, you could see the bare poles and rope rigging of a circus big top. The canvas itself lays on the ground, ready to be hoisted into place. All around were gay red trucks, trailers and bunk wagons, some of them with less than bashful signs claiming them to be part of the Card Bros. Shows. Around this circus gear several men in overalls were working."

marionette show. Then along about 1880, I had Barney Chambers' Museum. Barney Chambers went ahead of one of the Kickapoo Indian Companies. There were about twenty Kickapoo shows in those days. Chambers got this museum somewhere and I took it out for him. In the museum, we had a couple of camel-backed horses, a four-legged rooster, a rooster with hair instead of feathers and such like attractions. Our biggest attraction was a pig, the biggest one I ever saw. It weighed 1,500 pounds, was eight feet long and girded over eight feet.

"When I left the museum, I worked along the shore at Oakland Beach, clamping and fishing, and then provided opened claims to Rocky Point when Charley Maxfield had it.

"Then I went up to the city and got a job as receiving clerk in the Narragansett Hotel. This gave me evenings free so I was able to work as a property man and super at the Providence Opera House. I had small parts with the Jersey Lily, you know, Lily Langtry, and other shows in which I was in the mob scenes. Some of them were 'The Count of Monte Cristo' with James O'Neill, with Brooks and Dixon in 'Romany Rye' and with Kiralfis [sic] in 'Around the World in Eighty Days.'

"After getting through with the hotel and the Opera House, I opened up a rooming house in Providence and also worked for a wire company. I've been working for the wire company pretty steady ever since.

"A couple of years ago, I met a fellow who said I could buy some trained ponies up in New Hampshire. I bought six, giving \$100 a piece for them. After I had the ponies, I began getting me together a show.

"My tent came from down in New York. The seats, I built myself and when those Skunk Hunters had their meeting a while back I rented the seats to 'em for \$40. I've got seats enough for about 800 people. Some of my tent poles I cut in the woods up in back of here and gradually I bought enough automobiles and trucks to move the show around with. Yes, I guess you'd call it a home-made circus.

"Last year, just before we was ready to go out, I bought some trained dogs down in Virginia. I got four more this past winter, young ones, and we're training 'em now. My son, George, there, he's the equestrian director. He puts on the plug hat and all that sort of things and runs the show. Does a good job of it, too.

"Last summer [1934] we were out for about thirty or forty stands playing in small towns round about Rhode Island, Connecticut and Massachusetts. Then the strike troubles came along and we ran into a few bad days, so we came in.

"This year [1935], soon's I get the show ready, I figure to go up through Connecticut

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Pass used by the R. T. Card Dog & Pony Show in 1934. Pfening Archives.

and Massachusetts and places like Chepachet, Coventry and Comimicut. Then, come fall, I hope we'll be able to play out through New York State and then head south for the winter.

"Looks as though we'll have a pretty fair show this year. I'm going to have the same clowns I had last year. There's Mr. Fickett (George Fickett) from Boston, who plays an Irish biddy character. Then we have an Italian dwarf--I don't know anybody who can pronounce his name--who works with Mr. Fickett, and Buck Leahy, who does comedy contortions and a ring act in the air.

"A lady from Ohio named Emma Raymond does the balancing trapeze, slack wire and revolving rope act and Miss Emma Draw has a sort of juggling and fire act. The trained dogs play leap frog, push a baby carriage around, jump through hoops and such like. The ponies do jumping and posing and one of them is a kind of crazy horse that chases the clowns out of the ring. For the big windup, Jennie here (the large Rhesus monkey) rides one of the ponies around the ring. All in all, it's a show that lasts about an hour and a half.

Randall T. Card and his monkey Jennie. Photo taken in the Card quarters in June 1935. Providence *Evening Bulletin* photo. Pfening Archives.



"We have upwards of twenty people travelling around. My wife takes the tickets and my daughter sells 'em. Then my daughter and son-in-law have the candy concession.

"Right now, my big problem is getting a band. You'd be surprised how hard it is to get four or five musicians to travel with a circus. The performers and bandmen aren't much help when it comes to

working the circus. But I have six or seven boys to drive the trucks and get the show up and down. I provide the caps and coats for the band but the rest of the performers bring their own costumes.

"We've been working now for about eight weeks and I figure we'll be ready to go in a couple of days.

"No, I don't want an elephant though they do say it isn't a circus without one. But I read in the papers the other day about an elephant killing a little girl out in Ohio and I don't want any animals that will hurt anybody.

"About the name? Well, I'll tell you. I don't have any brother but I call it Card Brothers Show because then the public will think that there's several people in back of it and they'll have more confidence in it."

Byrnes said that the show's rolling stock, most of which had been adapted to circus purposes by Mr. Card and his "Boys," consisted of several busses used to house the troupe, a candy concession wagon, a truck for the ponies, a trailer for the two generating units which lighted the circus and charged batteries against power failure, and a trailer for the tent poles and canvas. He also noted that a man called "Smitty" was working on another trailer designed to carry tent poles and the seats. When the show was on tour "Smitty" worked as a truck driver and was boss canvasman.

Smitty said that Mr. Card worked hard on his show and observed: "You don't find many men his age who will take and build themselves a whole circus. No sir. And he put on a nice little show, if I do say so myself. Why, when he was out last summer, he just about held the whole shebang together, helping to get the canvas up, looking after the animals and even doing a bit of cooking if need be. And you'd ought to see him walk. Why, he'll out walk either you or me, he's that spry on his feet."

The newspaper article concluded by saying that since the interview took place with Mr. Card early in the week, the show had been touched up with red paint, the performing troupe had gathered, and on July 1 Rhode Island's only circus rolled out of the Salisbury farm yard for its second season, and the author reminded his readers, "you'll probably be seeing it around."

From this most informative piece we

can conclude that Card Bros. in 1935 would move on about six or seven vehicles and performing under a big top which would seat about 800. Mr. Card pretty well outlined the program to be presented. The photo appearing with the article shows a big top appearing to be about a 60 foot round with one 30 foot middle, fronted by a neat marquee.

Very little is known about the show's 1934 season. John Cutler had information that Card Bros. paid \$3 a permit to exhibit at Greenville, Rhode Island on June 18. Edward Kelty visited the Card show in East Douglas, Massachusetts on June 29 and took a photo of the entire company.

The photo is identified as the R. T. Card Dog and Pony Show, not Card Bros. The October-November 1934 *White Tops* reported that F. E. Loxley of Cranston, Rhode Island had seen Card Bros. at Lakewood, Rhode Island on August 1. The time frame of known stands about covered the length of the season which according to Mr. Card's interview was about thirty or forty dates.

The Card circus didn't make the pages of *Billboard* until the very last issue of the year on December 29. It reported that Frank Smith of Plainville, Connecticut and R. T. Card of Coventry, Rhode Island would have a one ring circus on the road the next season. The tentative name for the show was Yankee Smith Circus and Card Bros. Trained Animal Shows Combined. Card's dogs and ponies were to be with the show. Practically all of the performers who toured with Card Bros. in 1934 were to be with the show. It was mentioned that four trailers and two double cages had been built in Smith's quarters in Plainville. The Richard Troupe of clowns and comedy acrobats plus the Nutmeg State Mountaineers, a musical and hillbilly act, would be with the new organization which was scheduled to open early in May and play New England territory.

Further information on the new show came in the January 26, 1935 *Billboard* which said that R. T. Card's dogs, ponies and monkeys were in training at the quarters of the Yankee Smith Circus in Plainville, and were to play a number of dates before the show itself opened.

The new Yankee Smith show never got out and no further information about it appeared in the trade publication until mid-December 1935 when Frank Smith announced that because of some setbacks he had been unable to go on the road during the season just concluded. In any event Card returned to his quarters in Coventry to get his own show ready for the road. No further mention was made of a possible merger of Card and Smith. The name

of the opening stand for Card Bros. in 1935 was not announced but William Lumb wrote the *Billboard* that he was serving as advance agent for the show and that it would open July 1 and play one day stands in New England. Lumb said the show was motorized, carried its own light plant and had a six piece band. Among those with the show were Marion Drew, juggler and aerialist; Emma Raymond, iron jaw and trapeze; and Buck Leahy, clown and juggler. George Fickett and Shorty Gamarco were additional clowns.

Further *Billboard* notes indicated some of the show's performers had been with other circuses prior to the rather late opening of Card Bros. It reported that Buck Leahy and Frank Clark, cornetist had closed with Hunt's Circus on June 15 in Athol, Massachusetts, and joined Card Bros. later at East Greenwich, Massachusetts. Another note said that George Fickett and Half Pint Dewey (possibly another moniker for the Italian dwarf) had joined Card Bros. at Jewett City, Connecticut.

The July 20 *Billboard* said that Card Bros. had a snappy six piece band, Frank Clark, leader and solo trumpet; Don Mitchell, first trumpet; Joe Shay, trombone; Charles O'Dowd, baritone; Eddie Townsend, bass and Don Campbell, double drums.

Buck Leahy became the show's *Billboard* correspondent and for several weeks provided some interesting items on the Card show.

The July 27 issue noted that Card Bros. was doing very good business through Rhode Island. Jane (Skippy) Boland, aerialist had joined. A new 30 foot middle piece for the big top had been received at Hope Valley, Rhode Island. At Sterling, Connecticut the show had a fair matinee and a good night house. Emma Raymond had been called to New York City due to her sister's illness, but had returned at Pascoag, Rhode Island.

Leahy reported in the August 31 *Billboard* that Bert Barnes, drummer, closed with Hunt's Circus at Bar Harbor, Maine and had joined Card Bros. at Sound Beach, Connecticut. Several items appeared a week later in

Card Bros. Circus on a lot in 1935. The big top, four ponies and some of the trucks are shown. Providence *Evening Bulletin* photo. Pfening Archives.



Coming Coming Coming

# CARD BROS. SHOWS



RIDING MONKS  
AERIAL ACTS  
FUNNY CLOWNS

Guaranteed a Wholesome  
Two-Hour Entertainment for  
Ladies, Gentlemen and Children

THE ONLY MOTORIZED  
SHOW OF ITS KIND



SEE THE FUNNY  
CLOWNS! CLOWNS!

The Kings of Joy and Laughter  
To Amuse The Children

See These Funny Fellows and  
Gloom Chasers

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JEWETT CITY, CT

SUNDAY, JULY 12

FRIDAY, JULY 12

Adults 25c - Children 15c

2 Performances Daily 2.15 P.M. and 8.15 P.M.

Herald distributed by the Card show during the 1935 season. Pfening Archives.

the September 7 issue. At Glastonbury, Connecticut, August 31, the show had a fair matinee and a big night house. There had been a late arrival in Windsor Locks but the stand had produced two good houses. Personnel notes said that Anna Haskins had added two dogs to her act and Emma Raymond had added several new tricks to her wire act. A separate bit in the same issue noted that

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**CARD BROS.**

**ALL NEW**

**CIRCUS**

Traveling In Our Own Train Of Big Modern Trucks. Everything Brilliantly Lighted From Our Own Electric Light Plant

Show Rain or Shine

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**Three Separate Distinct Acts**

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Every Act A Feature :: Praised By Press and Pulpit

A Big Clean Generous Entertainment For All The Family!

The "New Deal" Show-The Show that's Different

All Will Be Here Show Day!

BRING THE CHILDREN

A Good Clean PERFORMANCE For All The Family

TO CARD PERFORMERS TO THE FAIR AND CIRCUS SHOWS OR MIND ONE ACT AT A TIME IN ONE REIGN WILL BE PRESENTED TO ENABLE ALL TO THOROUGHLY ENJOY AND FULLY APPRECIATE THE ENTERTAINMENT. THE CARD BROS. CIRCUS IS THE ONLY ONE IN THE COUNTRY WHICH IS ABLE TO PRESENT THESE PRACTICALLY ONE-HOUR DRILLS, ALL PRESENTED WITH A DANCE AND FINISH, WHICH IS UNPARALLELED IN THE COUNTRY. THE CARD BROS. CIRCUS IS THE ONLY ONE WHICH IS ABLE TO PRESENT THESE PRACTICALLY ONE-HOUR DRILLS, ALL PRESENTED WITH A DANCE AND FINISH, WHICH IS UNPARALLELED IN THE COUNTRY.

Two Performances--Afternoon at 2 P.M. -- Evening at 8 P.M. WILL EXHIBIT AT

CANAAN MONDAY 1/36

Adm. Children 15c - Adults 25c

CURTIS SHOPPING, CONTINENTAL, OHIO

The Card show used this herald in 1936. W. B. Kramer collection.

trombonist Shay had returned to his home because of illness. William Lumb, advance agent and bill poster, had returned to his home in Pawtucket, Rhode Island to work the rest of the racing season at the Narragansett race track.

The September 21 *Billboard* said Frank Clark, bandleader, had left Card Bros. The band had been replaced by a sound system which was first used at Gales Ferry, Connecticut. However Bert Barnes, trap drummer, had been retained. The show's advance work was then being done by George Card, the owner's son. A final note advised that the show was headed back to Rhode Island.

No closing stand was announced but it is believed that it was probably Bradford,

Rhode Island, as the September 28 *Billboard* reported that Buck Leahy closed there and was playing fairs through New England. Jane Boland, aerial rings had closed and was playing the Show Boat in Portland, Maine.

The *Billboard* said that many motorized circuses toured New England during the summer of 1935, and at one time Kay Bros., Hunt's, Downie Bros., Barnett Bros., Gorman Bros. and Card Bros. were in Massachusetts. Also in the state was the big railed, Hagenbeck-Wallace-Forepaugh-Sells. The Ringling-Barnum show had also made New England dates.

The December 14 *Billboard* carried an article in which Frank Smith said he would definitely take Yankee Smith's One Ring Circus on the road in 1936 after being delayed a year in launching it. No mention was made of any possible association with R. T. Card, so evidently all plans for a combination were now dead. The piece also said that recent visitors to the Plainville, Connecticut quarters were Jane Boland, a performer with Card Bros. the previous season and Charles Smith, who had been boss canvasman for Card for the past two seasons. The later was obviously the "Smitty" mentioned in the Providence newspaper article.

As the year ended Randall Card was back with his show in its usual quarters at the Salisbury Farm near Coventry.

Leonard Simmons of Providence, Rhode Island reported in the April-May 1936 *White Tops* that he had recently spent a happy afternoon when he paid a visit to the Card Bros. winter quarters. He found the ponies and dogs comfortably housed at a farm nearby and had been taken through the quarters by George Card, son of the owner. Mr. Card stated that for the coming 1936 season the show would be out as a first class outfit. The big top was to have three center poles and performances would be in two rings. He also said there was to be a side show.

There was no subsequent information about Card Bros. plans and activities in either the *White Tops* or the *Billboard* until after the season began. The show did place two advertisements in the *Billboard*. The ad in the May 23 issue read: "Wanted. Versatile circus performers that can do two or more acts and work in concert. Side show to let with your own transportation. Card Bros. Circus, Coventry, Rhode Island.

Another ad in the June 13 issue read: "Wanted. Lady aerial performers. Side show privilege with own transportation. Join or wire. Card Bros. Circus, Coventry, R. I."

The show probably opened in late June or early July as was its custom. F. E. Loxley said in the July 11 *Billboard* that he had seen Ringling-Barnum at Providence and Card Bros. at Norwood, both in his home state of Rhode Island.

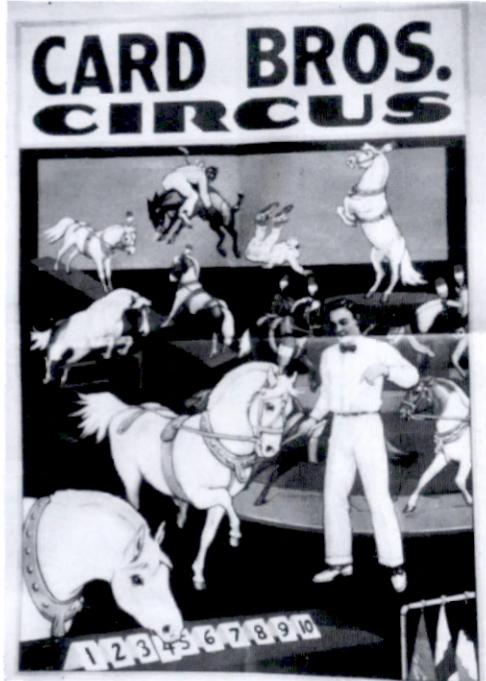
Nothing further about the show was published until the July 25 *Billboard*. It reported from Fitchburg, Massachusetts that there had been a severe thunder and electrical storm there on July 18 at Northboro, Massachusetts and the Card Bros. big top, 70 by 140 feet, had been torn to shreds by the high winds. The circus management was forced to suspend business until July 20 in order to get a new big top.

This initial report of the storm damage was later said to have been exaggerated, as the August 1 *Billboard* said J. G. (Jack) Bard, general agent for Card Bros., reported that the big top was not torn to ribbons, as mentioned in the prior week's issue. Bard advised that the tent was somewhat damaged, but that a new middle piece replaced the damaged canvas and that the show had lost only one night performance in Northboro. Bard said the show had toured Rhode Island and Massachusetts and was then in Connecticut. The show's management expected to have a long season and go south as far as the Florida line.

Only one other item about Card Bros. came in the *Billboard*, that being in the September 12 issue which noted that the Aerial Delzarios had left the show to play fairs. This coming in mid-September, the time Card Bros. usually called it a season, would indicate in all probability the show had closed when the act left.

A through search of the *Billboard* files for the rest of 1936 and into the early months of 1937 failed to reveal any information about

This stock Donaldson lithograph was used by the Card show in 1935. Pfening Archives.



the Card show. The late John P. Grace printed a record of circuses on the road, giving opening and closing dates and winter quarters in the *White Tops* at the close of the 1936 season. His extensive list on the road in 1936 does not mention Card Bros. This was no doubt due to so little being known about it. However, we do know that some of fans along the limited Card route did catch the show.

A good possibility exists that the first report of the storm damage in Northboro may

have been nearer the truth that the later advisory from the Card general agent and that loses suffered hastened the demise of the show. Another factor was that the 1936 season did not treat kindly the many smaller shows on the road. Two other small circuses, Maynard Bros. and Bockus & Kilonis, didn't last long on their tours in New England. The summer of 1936 was one of the hottest on record, as earlier in the year floods had been wide spread through many areas of the east and mid-west, all of which weren't

helpful to good circus business. No evidence of the disposition of the Card property or animals is known. At age 77, Randall T. Card, having reached his lifelong goal of having his own circus and touring it three seasons, evidently decided to go into quiet retirement. And thus the title of Card Bros. Circus, after its short appearance on the scene, faded into history.

The author thanks Edward F. Tracy of Middletown, Rhode Island for his help in the preparation of this article.

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## PART SIX

# HERBERT'S HORSES

BY DOROTHY HERBERT

### CHAPTER 68 MONKEYS

Why I should write a chapter about monkeys I'll never know because they are something I know very little about; but, they were there off and on, and I guess I owe it to my readers to share my limited experiences with them.

The first one I ever met in person was when I was standing at the back door of the circus tent with my long rein horse waiting to go on. The act I was to follow consisted of an assortment of monkeys. One of them got loose from the trainer and, espying the feathers on my headdress, proceeded to attack it, including my hair and scalp. I ended up covered with my own blood and was sent to the hospital where, in order to put in the necessary stitches, they shaved off part of my hair. That event did not endear the little creatures to me one bit.

A little later on, when we had acquired a dog act and A. W. broke a riding-dog and monkey act. We did have a monkey of our own, a tiny cinnamon capuchin who didn't know he was a monkey and loved everybody. We called him Cocoa.

My next encounter was while I was appearing with the Garden Bros. Circus in Canada. I had the misfortune to again follow a monkey act with my white driving horse. As they were going out the back door, one of these chimps jumped at me and landed in my arms. Mr. Watkins shouted, "Freeze! Don't move!" He needn't have bothered, I was petrified. The chimp looked into my eyes and reached up and kissed me on the cheek.

"He likes you," said Ira Watkins, for which I was thankful. Ira told me the chimp's name was Taboo, and I got into the habit of having a little goodie for him each time he passed by, and the chimp and I became good friends.

One day Mr. Watkins asked me if I would come over to his trailer. He had a little baby chimp, and it was a doll, but he was having some trouble getting it to take its food. His wife, who no longer went on the road, had been raising it while he had been at home and now, for some reason, it was refusing to eat. He thought that perhaps it missed his wife. He gave me a blanket to put across my knees, and a short time later the chimp had crawled up on my lap. It looked me over, and I guess I passed inspection. Mr.

Watkins handed me a can of baby food and a spoon, and I dug out a spoonful and presented it to the chimp, who promptly turned its head away.

I paid no attention to it, whatsoever, nor did I again offer it anything to eat; rather, I pretended that I was eating the food. I put the spoon from the can to my mouth and made noises which I hoped would sound like sounds of enjoyment to a chimp. I licked my chops and started the spoon going faster, as if I intended to eat the whole can of food. The chimp started hollering as though someone were sticking it with pins and, after grabbing the can of food from me, started to scoop the contents into its mouth--without the aid of a spoon. Not the best of table manners, but at least it was eating. From then on I visited with them every day. Sometimes Mr. Watkins would let Taboo come in and join us.

Mr. Watkins and his two sons traveled in two units. One boy drove the big truck with the chimps and the props, the other son drove the car which pulled the house trailer in

Ira Watkins and one of his trained chimps. Pfening Archives.



which they lived. Mr. Watkins rode in the car with him.

There came a day when we had an unusually long trip. Buddy, with the truck containing the chimps and the props, got to the building in time for the show, but the other brother and the father did not make it, having had to stop and change a flat tire on the trailer.

The house was packed, several of the other acts had not yet arrived. The show was about to start when Buddy appeared and asked me if I would please help him out. The management was asking him to put on the chimp act and there was just no way that he could do it alone. He could leave out a couple of the chimps and still put on an act, but he needed a few seconds between tricks to take off the roller skates, etc. Would I please help?

"But I know nothing whatsoever about chimps," I stated.

"Well," said Buddy, "here is my idea. We both know that Taboo likes you, take him in and place him on his seat. I will bring in two more that I work, the rest we will leave out. There is no time to try to practice anything, so I will work my chimps as I always do; then, when I turn my back, you take out Taboo. If we are lucky, he will go to the prop that is his, either the scooter or bicycle, and do his trick. This will give me the time I need to get ready for the next part of the act."

When we entered the ring, Buddy placed his chimps on their seats and I, holding Taboo's hand in mine, led him to his. Just as we reached it, he grabbed me around the neck, causing me to stumble and fall backwards, landing on the seat with dear Taboo on top of me. I scrambled to my feet and stood behind the seats trying to look as though I had some business being there.

Buddy did a couple of tricks with his chimps and then shouted, "The scooter, put Taboo on the scooter." This I did, and as he went around and around I kept calling out encouragement to him. I guess he liked this, because he just kept going on and on and I couldn't stop him. Buddy finally grabbed him as he went sailing by and, after handing him to me, went on with the act.

One of the webs from an aerial act was tied off quite close to the stage on which we supposed to be putting on an act. Taboo espied it and took this opportunity

to show off . . . up the web he climbed; without thinking, I started to climb up the web after him. Suddenly it dawned on me that the people were laughing, not at the antics of Taboo, but at me.

Buddy managed somehow to finish the act and leave the stage with his two chimps, closely followed by me, dragging Taboo by one hand, while in his other he was clinching for dear life a box of Cracker Jack, which he had managed to grab from a passing candy butcher; and we came face to face with Ira Watkins who was laughing his head off. Mr. Watkins tried several times to get me to again appear in the act, but once was enough . . . as far as I was concerned that act was TABOO!

My next experience with a monkey turned out badly. He was a very big rhesus and A. W. had trained him along with two dogs and a pony to do a riding act. We had had a similar act when we were playing fairs. This one he had broke while with the Clyde Beatty Circus. It was just a fill-in act, but it went over well with the youngsters. It worked early in the show and sometimes if A. W. was late getting back from the pony ride and did not have time to change into wardrobe it would fall my lot to work the act.

One day, while in the middle of the act, I caught this monkey staring at me with a strange look on his face. After you have worked with animals for many years you develop a sort of sixth sense which warns you when something is amiss. A. W., by this time, had entered the tent and was standing outside of the ring. I called to him to come in and take over. Thinking that I was ill or something, he finished the act. Later, when I explained my misgivings, A. W. pooh-poohed the idea. Jocko would not hurt anyone; nevertheless, I refused to work the act any more.

Less than a week later, Jocko bit A. W. on the arm as he was putting the monkey in his cage. A. W. excused Jocko, saying it was just an accident. Two days later at the matinee, during the riding dog act, Jocko left his seat and jumped on A. W., for no apparent reason, tearing his dress suit pant leg to bits and chewing on his leg from the knee to the ankle.

Jocko then left the ring and, dragging his lead rope, headed for his cage in the backyard, seeking safety, only to find the door closed. His eyes were red as fire as he sat there glaring at everyone. One of the cow-

boy ropers from the concert threw a rope and it landed around Jocko's neck. Someone else quickly grabbed the rope Jocko was dragging, and now they had him between them, but where he could not grab them. A policeman, who seemed to have taken charge, told them to follow him into a little grove of trees behind the tent. I heard a shot, and they came back and handed me Jocko's lead rope and collar. They said that if Jocko had attacked a child in the same manner, he could have killed it. While all of this was going on, I had quickly changed out of my scanty costume into street clothes so I could go to the hospital. It was a long time before I was permitted to see A. W. When I did get to see him, he told me to carry on, and I did. He would have to remain there for several weeks, and when he did return to the show, he never asked what had happened to Jocko, and I never told him.

## CHAPTER 69 GENE AUTRY

Near the end of the season, A. W. told me that he was going to work for Gene Autry, the cowboy movie star. Now this move made



Johnny Agee and his liberty horses on the Ringling-Barnum Circus in 1919.  
Pfenning Archives.

absolutely no sense to me at all. A. W. was in no way movie struck and had no aspirations of going into pictures. I was at a complete loss to understand why he had ever made such a deal. The salary he was to make was not that terrific.

I was well satisfied where we were. We had our own acts, what I considered pleasant associations, an adequate salary, plus, we were making quite a nice sum on the pony ride.

I was concerned as to what was going to happen to my horses and ponies and our dog

act. A. W. assured me that there was plenty of room for everything at the ranch where we were to live, and Mr. Autry had said they would all be welcome.

Johnny Agee, who had been one of the leading horse trainers in his day, was now well along in years. At one time he had had his famous brewery act on the fair circuit advertising a well-known beer, much the same as the Anheuser-Busch Company is advertising their beer today, using a team of Clydesdale horses in many of the leading parades.

I had seen Johnny's act once when I was very young, but I had never forgotten it: four large draft horses came down the track pulling a long flatbed wagon, on which was mounted three barrels large enough for a horse to be standing in each of them. The wagon would stop behind the circus ring, the three lovely, matched bay American saddlebred horses would jump down, enter the ring and go through their liberty act. At the finish of the act, the three would jump back into their respective barrels and be carried down the track to a resounding round of applause.

John had joined Gene Autry when Gene was first starting out and had worked for him for many years, training the first "Champion" and all of the rest that followed.

He still went to the ranch each day, but was no longer able to work. Gene was in need of someone to break some new horses for him. John had advised him to try to hire A. W., which he did.

So, once more, I said goodbye to the circus. Luckily, my old friend, Jack Gibson, who had made the never-to-be-forgotten trip from Florida to California, was now on the Beatty show as the ring stock boss. I had been told that the horses and my ponies would be put in pasture at the ranch, and I would not

need a groom. I asked Jack to not only give Jimmy a job, but to look after him as well. Jack promised he would do so and he kept his word. With tears in my eyes I told Jimmy that if I ever had a job for him, I would let Jack know about it and send for him.

So, the house trailer was placed behind Gene Autry's ring barn and I was on the famous Melody Ranch, which sounded delightful in the movie magazines, but, in reality it was far from it. Located way out in the San Fernando Valley, high up in the mountains, with rock and huge stones, it was hot as Hades, and full of rattlesnakes. I wasn't quite sure what I had done wicked in my life that I had been sent to the bad place, but I was convinced this was hell. I spent most of

my waking hours huddled in the house trailer except when I was watering, feeding, and taking care of the dogs.

Most of the time, the horses that went to the studio were loaded up early in the morning and they would return real late. A.W. would go straight to bed so I seldom had a chance to talk to him.

On the days that they were not working at the studio, the cowboys and wranglers would gather around and swap tales, but it was evident from the first that there was no place for me there. I cramped their style.

It had been bad enough when they were working at the studios, but then it came time for them to go on the road for several months on a personal appearance tour with an indoor rodeo. Of course, I was left behind. Just before they left, A. W. bought me a television set, the first that I ever had.

After everyone left to go with the rodeo, the only people who I ever saw were the caretaker when he came twice a day to feed the horses that had been left behind, and once in a while his wife if she happened to be out taking a walk.

Other than a trip once a week to the grocery store, there was no place else to go. The nights too were frightening. The caretaker's house was quite a distance from where the house trailer was parked and besides that after the others had all left and gone on the rodeo circuit, and after the horses were fed in the evening, the caretaker and his wife usually left to visit with their son who lived not far away to play cards most of the night. So the days dragged on and on.

I had plenty of time to reminisce. About a month prior to the closing of the Beatty show, my lovely white stallion was walking down the ramp from the train when it broke with him on it. They had tried to save him, but he was hurt so badly it was not possible. My beautiful wedding present. Before moving to the Autry ranch, A. W. sold the two palomino stallions.

Each day I would go to the pasture where my ponies were kept with some sort of treat for them, then I would visit with King Kong and Rex. The pasture extended a long way into the hills and other horses belonging to Mr. Autry also roamed there, but somehow King and Rex knew about when I was due and would be at the gate waiting for me. Then, one day, Rex alone awaited me. I went for the caretaker and we saddled up two horses and went to look for my dear King Kong. He had died in his sleep. He was still fat and beautiful, the years were just against him.

## CHAPTER 70 BIRD WONDERLAND

Circus fans are a big part of any show and a great help. Some of them even join up and spend their vacations with the show. One

was C. B. Glick. He would come on the show and help out by collecting tickets at the front door; that was how A. W. became acquainted with him.

Mr. Glick was an importer of birds and small animals, such as monkeys. He had a bird farm and pet shop in Encino, California, and he also furnished birds and other animals to the motion picture industry and television studios. What stories he had told A. W., of course, I did not know. All I know is that while we were in Clyde's winter quarters,



Dorothy and her husband A. W. Kennard with their trained birds. Author's collection.

Mr. Glick would call A. W. to take studio calls, in preference to the men who were working for him. I was busy breaking in three new dogs for the dog act, and didn't pay much attention to what A. W. was doing. I did know that animal handlers' pay was good, and that A. W. was impressed and liked the work. Before I had any idea at all of what was happening, Mr. Glick had talked A. W. into buying a half interest in his business.

I was aghast. A. W. assured me that we were very lucky to have connected with such a man, and he would do far better than in show business.

The hardest thing I ever had to do was say, "Sorry, I'm going away," to my friends at winter quarters. Somehow I had an idea that I was saying goodbye forever to the circus world, which I so dearly loved, and I was. I had a feeling that I would never ever have another chance to run away and join a circus again, and I never did.

Now, the most unhappy years of my life. I had a premonition the moment I set foot in the place. Mr. Glick lost no time in telling me what I had to do: my part in the business would be to run the store, handle the books, answer the mail, clean all of the cages in the

front part of the store before opening in the morning, wait on the customers, and take phone calls.

It was far from easy. I had never made out my own income tax, so a bookkeeper was called in and he informed me that he was going to teach me how to "post" (I had always thought that was a way to sit on a horse). It took time, but I did learn to keep the books.

Living in the house trailer which was parked at the far end of the bird farm was far from pleasant. The bird farm was smelly and

I am sure not a very healthy environment in which to be confined both day and night. The ponies were in a corral and posed no problem, but the dogs were housed in runs that had formerly been used to keep monkeys. Since they could see each other through the wire, it seemed appropriate to them that a marathon barking contest was in order. Sixteen dogs can make enough racket to disturb one's slumber, and waking hours, too.

When Mother learned that we were in business and no longer on the road, she again came to live with us. She was surprised when she saw the conditions under which we were living.

I had saved my money diligently during the season when I had been on the Beatty show by myself. Since it looked as though we were going to be stuck here for quite some time, I went in search of a house. I found what I was looking for in a surprisingly short time. It wasn't just a house, it was quite adorable. Situated on a little over an acre of ground, it was a cozy little two bedroom ranch style house, and there was a two car garage, a barn in the rear, another building, which, with very little work, could be converted into a nice home for the dogs; all this on one side of the driveway. The other half acre was fruit trees, with the exception of an open space that had been used as a tennis court, and was later used by my circus friends as a parking space for their trailers.

It was only a short distance from the bird farm and I figured it would be easy to commute back and forth. I bought the place, and was quite pleased with the deal that I had made.

A. W. was away on a studio location job, where Mr. Glick had sent him at the time, and he was furious when he found out what I had done. I had bought a house without telling him about it, forgetting he hadn't asked my opinion when he took all of our money and bought the bird farm without consulting me.

The house trailer and the animals were moved to their new home and, strangely enough, in their new environment we again

had peace and quiet, away from all the squawking birds.

Since this was, for the most part, a mail order business, I found myself staying up until all hours of the night trying to get the mail answered. Many a day I did not have time for lunch.

Each day I grew to hate it more and more. After all of those years I had spent working with horses and other animals, I was now training parakeets to sit on my finger. I was, of course, learning a lot about birds, but I was sure that it was knowledge that would never be of any use to me.

The store was open every day, seven days a week. The hours were from seven in the morning until six in the evening. We opened at eight, but it took an hour before opening to get the place cleaned up. A. W., on the other hand, was enjoying his job very much. Going to the studios was fun, and it was easy work. BIRD WONDERLAND . . . the wonder is that I lasted as long as I did.

The studio was filming the life story of Pancho Villa. Rita Hayworth was cast in the role of his sweetheart, a Mexican girl who followed him from place to place, taking her pet parrot perched on her shoulder everywhere she went, even when she was riding horseback. A. W. went with them on location for four months to New Mexico, caring for the parrot that worked with Rita.

I had never gotten along very well with Mr. Glick, but as long as A. W. was around I had little to do with him. As a rule, he acted as though I did not exist, unless he found something that I had done that did not please him, then he would tell A. W. about it, always referring to me as "that woman" or "her." Tell "her" to do such and such. He never spoke my name.

Where, before, he had been in the store only part-time, now he was there every day and figuring out so many things for me to do, I never could find time to answer the mail on time, even though I worked until all hours after he left at six o'clock.

He nailed up a blackboard in the office and each day he would write out all of the things I was supposed to do, eliminating the necessity of talking to me. Since nothing I did ever seemed to please him, I did what I was able to and forgot about the rest.

When A. W. returned from location after the picture was finished, Glick told him that I would have to be replaced. My feelings were not hurt one bit. I had wasted three whole years working day after day, and never so much as a thank you. After I left, they hired a young couple to take my place.

The smog was starting to get so bad that Mother was becoming quite ill from it. The doctor told her that if she intended to remain in California, she would have to find some place out of town to live.

Since I now had time on my hands, I start-

ed looking around for another house. I found a place, way out in a small town called Thousand Oaks. It had been a dog kennel, so there was plenty of room for all of the animals. There were two houses on the property, so I promptly rented one of them out to help make the payments.

I was able to get quite a bit of work with the dog act on television shows and other spot dates. Then I bought a little one horse trailer and was able to also put on a little riding dog and monkey act. I did not use the ponies, as A. W. had retained the truck, but it didn't matter, I would not have been able to drive it anyway.



Burt Lancaster and A. W. Kennard with two of the birds used in *The Birdman of Alcatraz*. Author's collection.

I had put up the house in Encino against the payment on the one in Thousand Oaks. As soon as the deal was completed, Mother and I moved there. A. W. had taken the house trailer back to the bird farm, in which he lived. I assumed he was busy because I heard very little from him; when I did hear, to me the news was not good.

After I had left, Mr. Glick had talked A. W. into buying out his half interest in the bird farm. A. W. had signed a promissory note, which was now due. In order to meet it, it was necessary to sell the ponies, the dog act, the truck and trailer, and just about all of the stock he had on hand, including some of the animals used for studio rentals. He had already drawn out all of the money he had in the bank to swing the deal, but he was now the sole owner of Bird Wonderland. It was rumored that old man Glick had made a fortune from the business, now A. W. expected to do the same.

About a week after the ponies and dogs had left, A. W. called me on the phone and asked me to come back. He would have to let

the couple go, as he could no longer afford to pay them.

I was truly dismayed. I would think back over all those years of hard work, of skimping, and doing without things I would have liked to have had, and now to give it all to this old man Glick whom I hated. For what? I would think about the many youngsters that I had lifted on and off of ponies on the pony ride, how my back had ached; about the days when I was not feeling well, but had continued to work just the same. Always saving for the future, and now this was it!

Of course I went back to the bird farm, what else was there to do? And now, just what did I have to look forward to? The feeding and cleaning up after the animals in the outside cages was now part of my job, because there was not enough money to pay for extra help. Paul, the old Mexican who did all of the heavy outdoor work, was retained. I, who had always been so careful of my appearance both off stage and on, just let myself go. I wore blue jeans and shirts all of the time; my nails were broken and usually dirty.

Work was no stranger to me. All of my life I had worked hard . . . but some work is fun, other work is labor. There is a difference. My work was no longer a pleasure, it was a serious business. All of my exuberance was gone, and there was nothing at all to look forward to.

Since I had never been around when any of the deals with Glick had been made, I was in the dark as to what their agreement had been. A. W. had told me that when he bought out Glick's final interest in the business, Mr. Glick had assured him that he would continue to rent the property to him for the same amount he had been paying, unless there was an increase in the property taxes and this, of course, he would have to pass along. On the face of it, it seemed like a fair enough agreement. The leasing of the property was a separate deal from the partnership in the business. A. W.'s first lease was for five years, the second was to be for five more. Unfortunately, A. W. did not have this part of the deal in writing.

After I had been back at the bird farm about a month, I discovered that Mr. Glick was filling bird orders from his home, and he was also taking studio calls. He had kept certain birds and animals when he sold out to A. W., claiming that they were pets and he could not part with them. For years some of the studios had been in the habit of contacting him at home in reference to animal and bird jobs, as he usually had someone else running the pet shop.

Of course, this had not been the agreement; he had sold the business and everything that went with it. A. W. took him to court. The final bill of sale stated that the name "Bird Wonderland," inventory, goodwill, and future business were sold to A. W.

Kennard for X amount of dollars. The judge ruled that all future business meant just that. A. W. won the battle, but lost the war.

The first lease still had four months to go at the time of the trial and, as soon as it was up, Glick sold the property and we had to move. We moved everything that was left which, by that time, was very little, to the place that I had bought in Thousand Oaks.

A. W. never quite recovered from the blow that Glick had dealt him. He kept blaming himself for the loss of everything that we had worked so hard to get those many years. From that time on he was a changed man. He now kept telling me how happy he was that I had had the foresight to buy a piece of property.

Things grew steadily worse as time went on. Shortly after we moved to Thousand Oaks, the bottom started to fall out of the bird market. Two factors contributed to this: the first was when they stopped the exportation of all birds from Australia. Mr. Glick had had advance notice of this, and that is why he had wanted out of the business. Finches were a big item, the more colorful ones went for high prices; these were imported from Australia. The second reason was the swift drop in prices of birds which were being raised locally: parakeets, love birds, and cockatiels. The prices on them dropped to almost nothing when so many people began raising them in their backyards.

Studio calls were few and far between. If they called Mr. Glick, he told them we were out of business, and if they called the old bird farm in Encino, they reached a disconnected number. I sent each of the studios a card with our new phone number, and one of them paid off.

We were contacted in regard to a picture which would go into production later, but would require a great deal of preliminary work. After an interview, we were awarded the contract to furnish and train the birds.

Shortly after the picture went into production, we were asked by *All Pets* magazine if we would keep them posted as to how the picture was progressing, as they were very interested in it. The following chapters contain the material which I forwarded to them, and which they printed in their publication in three issues.

#### CHAPTER 71 THE BIRD MAN OF ALCATRAZ FROM INSIDE THE CAGE

In 1961 when we were contacted in regard to training the birds for Howard Hecht's movie, *The Bird Man of Alcatraz*, my first reaction was one of thankfulness that the life story of this great bird doctor would at last reach the public through the medium of motion pictures.

Frankly, when I found that Burt Lancaster was to play the part of Robert Stroud, I was



Burt Lancaster in *The Birdman of Alcatraz*. The birds used in the film were trained by Dorothy and her husband. Author's collection.

surprised as, to me, he did not seem quite the type. But, after two days on the set, I not only changed my opinion about that, but was convinced that no one else would have been able to play the part as well as he.

All actors try to assume the character of the person they are portraying, but this man actually lived the life of the "Bird Man" day by day. All throughout the many weeks of filming the scenes in the prison, there was a feeling of sadness and tension that conveyed itself to every member of the crew. The usual laughter and kidding that goes on between takes was not there.

Unlike most pictures that skip from one part of the script to another, this one was taken step by step right through the story. This was necessary on account of the makeup problems involved, as the actors go through the years in this story; thus, all of the crew was aware of everything that happened to this man as the story went along. So strong was the feeling of reality that, when the filmed the scene where Stroud was transferred to Alcatraz prison and the guards from there came to get him, as he said goodbye to Ransom, the man who had guarded him those many years in Leavenworth, all over the set you could see men blowing their noses and wiping their eyes. This was quite a testimonial from seasoned stage hands used to witnessing every kind of emotional scene and never batting an eye.

We were flattered, of course, to be select-

ed to train the birds for this picture but, upon receiving the script for it, had doubts as to whether we would be able to do it. Some of the things called for seemed to be almost impossible, and we told them so. Where Stroud had raised his birds from the nest and handled them every day, we were asked to take wild birds and try to tame them. Everyone was very considerate and told us to take our time and do the best we possibly could.

Since no baby sparrows were obtainable at that time of the year, we were obliged to trap wild ones. These we placed in a large outdoor aviary in order to get them used to being close to people. We spent weeks, first one and then another of us, just sitting in there with them before placing them in smaller cages.

We imported hundreds of canaries from both Holland and Japan, in order to have all different kinds available. Then we partitioned off part of a bedroom in the house, the same size as the cell occupied by Stroud. Since

we knew that either one or two sides would have to be open for the cameraman to take the shots, we enclosed two sides with plastic glass in order to get the birds accustomed to staying in a certain place. We put cages containing four birds apiece in this enclosure, and allowed the birds in each cage to come out every day, with some person sitting in there either reading a book or typing.

Feed, water, lettuce, etc., and their bathing dish were placed on the floor and table. The more aggressive birds were soon flying around and landing all over us. These were the ones chosen to work in the picture.

The first scene pertaining to birds was one of the most difficult to film. This is where Stroud finds the babies in a nest and the mother bird keeps flying around him. Since this takes place during a thunderstorm, with lights flashing, leaves flying, and a strong wind machine blowing, it was a very hard shot for the cameraman to get, and they spent most of the day on this one scene.

The sparrow had six "understudies," and each one (after making his bid for stardom as an actor) was dried off and placed in a nice, warm cage. Burt Lancaster, however, remained soaking wet through the entire thing with all that cold air blowing on him, and I was thoroughly convinced that by the next day he would be in bed with pneumonia and we would be out of a job.

In order to get a number of canaries to fly to you and light on you of their own accord, we used a well-trained bird we call "the teacher." Unlike the parakeet and cockatiel, on which you clip the wing feathers in order to finger train them, we were obliged to leave the canaries with their entire wings, as they had to fly all over the cell. We started

them flying low to the ground with "the teacher" coming to you first, and two or three of the others following. They soon learned to have no fear of people and would come to you from any point in the cell. Of course, each time they were rewarded with a treat.

Percy and Runty, the two featured sparrows, thought they should get co-star billing with Lancaster, but had to be satisfied with third billing. They were selected from over fifty birds. Both were not only very smart, but seemed to take a great delight in performing; also a little on the devilish side, they would pull on Burt's eyebrows while sitting on his glasses.

Our macaws, parrots, and trained cockatoos would work for anyone, but we were worried as to how these little birds would react to a stranger. We needn't have worried; in no time they found out who had the treats, especially the mealy worms at the end of the day. You will notice in the picture how they watch him, and react as though he were the one who had raised them. We found Mr. Lancaster to be a man of great patience and ready to devote a lot of time to winning the confidence of his little friends.

The set dressers came into their share of hard work and research on this picture, more so than in most period pictures where records are available on most every subject, and the equipment available. However, in this one they ran into things like having to have special medicine bottles made, as there were no screw cap bottles in those days.

I think a word of thanks is due to the Pet Dealers Supply Co. of California for their time and the assistance they so kindly gave us. Also, to the property men and the electricians, who cooperated in so many ways above and beyond the call of duty, such as helping to catch birds and furnishing us with lights when it was after time to go home. Everyone was wonderful, otherwise this would not have been such a pleasant experience.

This was the picture they said would never be made. It probably would not have if it were not for the persistence of the producer, Harold Hecht. Also, in the hands of someone else, this might have been just a run-of-the-mill picture, shot in a few weeks' time at the least possible expense. The Bird Man of Alcatraz cost as much and took the time necessary for a lavish production. You have no doubt read of the pressure that was being put on to try to suppress this picture; however, I was sure that Mr. Hecht would put it through, for here was a man that, busy as he was, always found time to take care of the smallest detail.

For example: Runty and Percy were trained in a cell just like the one used in the picture, except that we had two sides partitioned off with plastic glass. We began with Percy first, as he seemed the least frightened of the two. We kept him in a small cage for

several weeks after taking him from the large outdoor aviary where we kept all of the wild, trapped birds. Each day I fed Percy and the others with little, special treats. Then, for three days he and Runty had just the regular bird feed. I turned Percy loose and let him fly around the cell. Meanwhile, I sat on the floor with a dish in my lap, filled with all the

many scenes where they would be free in the cell, but they were not to fly around all over the place, so could we suggest where they might be inclined to stay? Not knowing where they might care to perch during the many days ahead, we turned them loose in the cell and let them fly around until they found a place to their liking. Of all places, they chose the old-fashioned shaving mug that was on the shelf, and for the rest of the picture, when either bird was not working or in his cage, that was their perch.

It is the custom of a company like this to have an urn of hot coffee and doughnuts or sweet rolls set out each morning for the crew when they arrive, as a little pick-me-up for them after the long drive most of them had to make to the studio. They have a carton of paper cups handy for the coffee and everyone helps themselves.

This happened to be one of those days when things were running late. The director called for Percy and Runty and we turned them loose in the cell. They flew to their usual perch, but their cup was gone and they flew all over the place. The director called me and I put them back in their cage. All of the prop men began hunting for the shav-

ing mug, but it could not be found. Someone suggested using a tin cup that Stroud might have placed there after having his meal, but the birds would have none of it. They stayed there only a couple of seconds and then flew away. Just then, in walked Mr. Hecht and, with everyone all "up in the air," he calmly said,

"You know, I think that someone in this company doesn't like his coffee out of a paper cup. I suggest that instead of wasting all this time hunting, you get on the loud speaker and announce, 'Will the mug that has that mug please stop acting like an ostrich and bring it back?'" A very sheepish newcomer to the crew then brought it back.

I would like to be able to say that we encountered no mishaps in making The Bird Man of Alcatraz, but that would not be true.

John Frankenheimer, the young director of this picture, was a perfectionist if there ever was one and, although he demanded the almost impossible, you could not help but admire the results he achieved. For a scene requiring Mr. Lancaster (as Stroud) to treat a sick bird, the director would settle for nothing but a sick bird. Since we tried to keep all



Burt Lancaster as convict Robert Stroud training sparrows as pets. Author's collection.

things he liked to eat. He flew all around and, after seeing there was no way out, he finally got tired and alit in a corner. I placed the training stick in front of him and, after he jumped on and off a few times, he finally concluded it was almost like a perch and decided to stay there. Getting him to my lap took a lot longer, and he stayed only long enough to grab a mealy worm from the dish before flying away.

I then turned Runty loose and he, at once, made a dive for Percy's worm. He then flew all over the place trying to find a way out, and then started to look around. Seeing the worms, he zoomed right over and grabbed one. Having gained this much, I then caught both birds and put them back in their cages. We continued this for a couple of weeks, three times a day, until it finally became a game with them and they would fly right to me as soon as their cage was opened.

The first day on the set, the producer explained that Percy and Runty were to be in

of our birds healthy, it was several days before we came upon one that was a little puffed up. We took it to the studio so that they could get the shot, and he at once wanted to know what medication could be given to it from an eye dropper. Since we had no medicine with us, we suggested a drop of brandy mixed with water. This concoction Lancaster gave to the bird. The scene was shot and we placed the bird in a heated cage. So much for that, everything was fine.

We got ready for the next take and looked around for Percy and Runty. Percy was right there on the job, but Runty was gone. Everyone became excited, as we thought he had flown off somewhere. He then came out from under the cell bed, but something was wrong. He walked a few steps and then fell over. We could not understand, he was all right less than an hour before. We placed him on the shelf with the water dish, thinking the lights might have made him too hot, but he staggered by the water and went to the container from which Mr. Lancaster had filled the eye dropper, and had himself another drink of brandy. Runty was drunk! I'll bet this was the first time a bird's hangover ever held up production.

When it rains, it pours. That night a beautiful red factor canary got loose. He flew clear out of sight and it was impossible to get him back. Next day was Christmas Eve and the plan called for us to finish early, in order to attend a party to be given by the producer, Harold Hecht, for everyone connected with the picture. Stroud's cell was full of male canaries. In filming a picture like this it was necessary to have a female bird as a double for every male, so that when there is dialogue, a male will not burst out in song and ruin a scene. The rest of the time they use the males, so their singing can be heard throughout the picture. The cages were swiftly changed and the female canaries put in; however, in doing this, one of the prop men let the bottom fall out of the cage and a European goldfinch and a Dutch frill canary escaped. One of the prop men climbed high up on the catwalk and put out feed and water where he thought the birds might find it; but, with the heat off in the studio over the long holiday, we were all worried as to what might happen to them. For some reason, the last scene of the day did not seem to run right and it required several retakes. Since it was a close-up, all of the lights were out except those on the two actors.

Suddenly, the director called out, "Something is wrong here, one of the female canaries is singing. Get it out of here." We rushed

in and there, sitting on top of the cages, were not only the Dutch frill and the goldfinch, but the red factor canary we had lost the day before. Needless to say, production stopped while we caught the runaways.

At the Christmas party a little while later, where everything from ham to turkey with all of the fixings was served, our host also served a drink before we dined. The toast was given by the prop man who, through no fault of his own, had let the birds loose. "I am thankful," said he, "that tonight I will be able to have a very merry Christmas with my wife and children, which I am sure I would not have had if I had to worry about those little birds that got loose."

After their one bid for stardom, Percy and Runty retired--Central Casting doesn't have too many calls for educated sparrows.

One of the members of the cast did make it big, however. He shaved off his hair, picked up a lollipop, and became an overnight sensation, Telly Salavas.

## CHAPTER 72 THE SAN FRANCISCO ZOO

When A. W. received the offer to go to work for the San Francisco Zoo, he had thought that he might like it for a while. He was still brooding over the dirty deal that old man Glick had pulled on him, and after finishing *The Bird Man of Alcatraz* he needed

the director asked if I might like to be in charge of it. After all of the hard work I had put in at the bird farm, I could think of nothing I might like less; however, I said I would give it a try. I was never sorry.

But, first, I had to return to Thousand Oaks and put my affairs in order there. I was assured that I had plenty of time as the building was just getting under way.

The commercial property in Thousand Oaks, which had been necessary in order to run a business, was far too expensive to keep up just as a residence. I bought a small house for Mother to live in, sold off the few birds that were left there, and put the place up for sale.

After getting Mother settled in her new home and finding someone to stay with her, I hired a truck and sent my white stallion and Wango, the gibbon ape, to the zoo. The rest of our equipment I stored in one side of the garage, and my personal things in a spare bedroom.

The Childrens' Zoo employed young college students as guides. Their duties were to acquaint the kiddies with the different species and show them the proper way to care for and play with them.

One of the main reasons for building the nursery had been to accommodate baby animals from the big zoo whose mothers, for some reason or other, had abandoned them.

This happens, at times, when animals are born in captivity. Many of these young animals had to be hand fed. I thought it might be a nice idea to have the guides handle the bottles and allow the children to assist in the feeding. The idea proved to be a big success and the children vied with each other to see who would get to hold the baby bottles.

The most popular of all was the baby elephant. The kids got such a kick out of giving her the bottle

that I continued to allow them to do so even after she was eating solid foods. Each year the big zoo would buy us a new baby elephant, and the one that we had would join the big herd there.

I often noticed how people would crowd around the monkey cages, observing their antics. Everyone seemed to be looking for entertainment. It seemed a shame that someone couldn't come up with an idea to help them while away their Saturday or Sunday afternoons.

The girls who were helping me in the nursery were very interested in my horse, Cimarron. When they learned that he had been with a circus, they kept asking me what he had done, so one Sunday afternoon I put a



Dorothy and her liberty pony act at the San Francisco Zoo. Author's collection.

to get away somewhere and think things out for himself. He blamed himself for everything that had happened. I understood, and did not try to dissuade him. He liked it there so well that he stayed with them for five years. He was put in charge of the Children's Zoo where all of the animals were let free to mingle with the kiddies, who were permitted to feed and play with them. I do not know who enjoyed it the most, the kids or the animals.

A. W. had been there close to a year when I went to visit him. They were in the process of putting in a nursery when I arrived, and

saddle on him and worked his act for them. Our guests seemed to enjoy the act also. It got so I would ride him each Saturday and Sunday for the entertainment of the visitors. People started to ask what time the show was going to be. Now, just one trained horse is hardly a show; I pointed that out to the directors. I told them that, with their permission, we could perhaps furnish a little entertainment. One thing led to another, and the zoo directors agreed to allow us to put on a little show. They had no idea what they were letting themselves in for.

Once we got the green light there was no stopping our gang.

A. W. and one of his helpers made a quick trip back to Thousand Oaks with a truck and picked up all of the props which we had there and brought them back to San Francisco. Since he could not take the time to sort them out, he just loaded them all. There were quite a few of them, and that gave our young folks a lot to think about. They kept asking questions, what was this and that used for?

The Children's Zoo was maintained mostly by donations. One kindhearted lady had spent a great deal of money to have an auditorium built where young people could produce and put on plays but, for some reason, no one did--we could now put it to good use. While some of the animals had to be trained outdoors, we could also do a lot of work inside.

Everyone employed seemed to want to be part of the show. We had a number of young men caretakers who, after their chores were done, had little to do until feeding time in the evening, except to keep order in the yard. When they learned that the people in the show were to train the animals themselves, under supervision, we had an ample supply of volunteers. Since our superiors seldom ever visited the baby zoo, as long as things were running smoothly and there were no complaints, it was months before they had an inkling of just how far the mania had progressed.

A. W. made several trips to the dog pound and bought an assortment of canines for a dog act. With all of the enthusiastic help at his disposal, it was only a matter of sitting back and giving instructions. An excellent dog act was soon in the offing.

We still had Wando, the ape who had worked in a riding dog and monkey act. This act would require a pony, so we bought one. Why not add a few more and have a pony drill?

Aerial acts had not been on the original agenda. Some of the students were well into

gymnastics, and when they discovered all of the riggings, they were anxious to try the stunts they had seen the circus stars perform. They were willing to come in after working hours, on their own time, if I would teach them. Knowing that this would interfere with the little leisure time I had (with all the baby animals there was always a late bedtime feeding for them) the students offered to take turns handling that chore, leaving me available to hold an aerial class in the auditorium.

to teach them to jump from the ground to the back of the horse. This might sound like a long way around to accomplish an objective, but Cimmaron was getting along in years, as horses go, and he had worked hard and deserved to be allowed to take it easy.

One of the boys, besides becoming a good rider, was also a natural as a clown. We copied some of the old Poodles Hanneford stunts, and he did them well.

It was soon evident that the bareback act would be the feature of our show. I wondered how we would cope with the fact that the students worked a five day week. There were substitutes for all of the other acts, but to break two sets of bareback riders was an impossibility.

With the fortitude of youth, the youngsters worked it out for themselves. In order to keep up with their classes and still hold down their job at the zoo, they had been in the habit of exchanging working hours with each other, so, in one way or another, they worked it out and the act was always in the show.

The auditorium was open and anyone that wished to do so could come in, sit down, and watch our practice session. It was surprising how interested people became in what we were doing. They kept returning, watching, and often bringing others with them.

The aerial acts were working great . . . indoors, that is. In the auditorium there were plenty of girders from which to hang riggings. We had single traps, double traps, swinging ladders, and webs, but the show was to be presented outdoors. Everyone involved became more concerned as we went along, but no one had a solution.

I was never able to get over the interest and enthusiasm which people displayed. This might have been understandable in some small town, but in a city like San Francisco, it was quite unbelievable. We had our first demonstration of this during a practice session when we were again having a discussion regarding our big problem.

Overhearing our conversation, a rather elderly gentleman entered into the debate. "I am wondering," said he, "why telephone poles wouldn't do the trick. How about it, young lady?"

"That would be great," I replied, "but where in the world would we get them?"

"Why, the phone company, of course. I will arrange it."

The men that brought the poles a few days later not only delivered them, but, after asking where they were to be placed, erected them in the air.



Dorothy, with whip, and the bareback act at the San Francisco Zoo. Author's collection.

The cockatoo breaking props were among the other things, and one of the girls was very interested in working a bird act. Of course, cockatoos were out of the question, but I told her that, if she liked, we could break a fan tail pigeon act.

Since all of the college kids worked a five day week, and the show would be put on for seven, it would be necessary to break two people to work each act. We would put on two shows each Saturday and Sunday, and one on weekdays after school was out for the day.

Several of the students were anxious to learn to ride, so I told them that we would have a tryout for a bareback act. First I taught them how to groom and harness the horse. I used an extra-heavy felt pad (which would later be dispensed with) under the surcingle, to protect not only the horse, but the riders as well. Each one was given several turns learning the correct way to sit, holding onto the hand grips at first, then turning each hand loose, then both at the same time. After attaining balance, there would be no need to use the hand holds, except when executing a trick.

Not wishing to impose any hardship on Cimmaron with a bunch of amateur riders, I had the kids rig up a dummy horse with equipment borrowed from the gymnasium. This I used to first teach them how to vault, both astride and side seat. Later on we used it

The second display of someone's benevolence came to us through the mail. The girls had expected to make their own wardrobe for the show, and the costumes for the boys, as well. Now, suddenly, we were told that this kind lady had been watching us train and was donating the money for all of the wardrobe necessary. She had consulted with a costume maker in town, and he had agreed to donate his services if she would shoulder the expense of the material; just give them an idea of what was needed. The lady wished to remain anonymous, but I thought maybe she sort of gave herself away when she closed her letter by saying how happy she was to see that the auditorium was finally serving a good purpose.

The board of directors, who had to put their okay on everything, including the purchase of a can of flea powder, requested a preview of this little entertainment they had heard we intended to inflict upon an unsuspecting public. Our dress rehearsal would be a private showing for them.

They strolled in like reluctant fathers being forced to witness Junior's rendition of The Charge of the Light Brigade, or little Susie's singing On The Good Ship Lollipop. To say that they were amazed would be putting it mildly. The results were just as amazing. A board of directors meeting was hastily called, and the outcome of it was that they had all agreed that with such an entertainment in the offing, an admission should be charged. The fee was small and no one objected to paying it. Soon we were having large crowds, especially on Saturdays and Sundays.

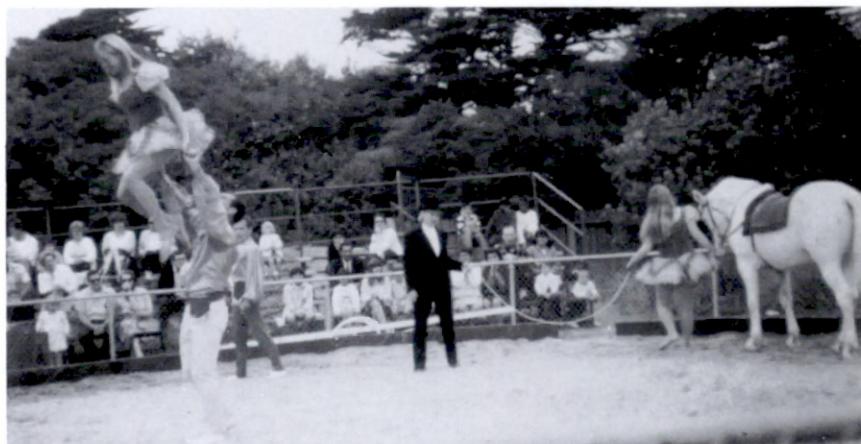
Families would bring their lunch and eat in the park and, between shows the kids could play with the baby animals. At first we had only a fence and a railing around the outside of the ring, and people watched the same as they did the cages in the big zoo. This did not last long, though; someone donated bleachers. So many people congregated in the Childrens' Zoo that they put in first one concession stand, and then another.

We had known all along that the show would have to close down for a few weeks during the rainy season, but everyone was sorry when that day came.

At our last show, we were surprised to see that all of the members of the board of directors were present. All of them had gotten into the habit of dropping by from time to time, but this was the first time since the opening that they had attended as a body. There was a huge crowd for our final perfor-

mance. Just before the show I was called aside and told that at the end of the last act I was to have all of the cast remain in wardrobe and line up for a final bow. Both sets of students were appearing in the last show of the season.

When they lined up, each girl was given a corsage, and each boy a flower for his lapel. I was so proud of them I could have cried.



Dorothy trained girls from a local college to perform in the Zoocus at the San Francisco Zoo. Author's collection.

Then the audience rose to their feet and began to applaud. The zoo director came into the ring and asked me to come forward and take a bow. He then explained that it was impossible to offer me a key to the city, but he did have at his disposal the key to the auditorium and would like to offer that. In one accord, we were all urged toward it and, after fitting the key into the lock, the door opened, revealing a sumptuous catered party.

During the off-season, we again worked out in the auditorium and added new things to our repertoire. The big zoo sent down a couple of macaws and three cockatoos, which we incorporated into the bird act.

The girls were having all sorts of ideas for new costumes and looking forward to our next season; and, so, I entered into my second year at the zoo.

### CHAPTER 73 PENGUINS

There is a place down around Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco called The Cannery. It consists of many shops, boutiques, and restaurants. As an attraction, the owners had built an amphitheater and hired a man to break a penguin act for them. Two shows were presented there each day. As time went on, the parking lots became overcrowded, and they needed more space for the customers that patronized the shops. Since the penguin show took up a great deal of space, they were going to abolish it. They told the zoo officials that they would donate the birds and props if someone at the zoo could handle the

act. Our director sent me out to look the act over, and when I told him it would, indeed, be a good addition, the board of directors agreed to accept it.

It was no small project transferring all of the paraphernalia. In the first place, quite a large pond had to be installed before the props could be erected. A large island in the center of it was also necessary. When it was completed, the penguin act was adorable.

The first act consisted of a penguin working on a skate board. An attendant would then place a surfboard in the water and one of the birds would swim up and place his head and neck through a loop that was attached to the board. Five or six penguins would climb on the board and away the underwater penguin would swim, faster and faster; one by one the penguins on the board would lose their balance and fall off into the water.

On the far side of the pond there was a high ladder which the birds would climb. On the other side of the ladder was a slide which they would scoot down, landing in the water with a splash. They seemed to enjoy this trick.

Then, back to the platform, where one of the penguins would play a toy piano. No tune, of course, but don't knock it. I can't play one either, leastwise not with my nose. Let's give credit where credit is due.

At this point, a little boat appeared on the scene. On the upper deck the captain pulled a string, causing a bell to ring madly. Penguins on either side scrambled aboard. I never did find out why; nonetheless, they would start out for a ride. There was a cork in the bottom of the boat to which an invisible wire was attached, the same as magicians use. An unseen attendant pulled the wire, releasing the cork, and water would then run in and the boat would begin to sink. One by one the birds would all jump off, except the gallant captain, who went down with his ship, still ringing the little bell.

For the finish trick, there was an elevator. Seven or eight of the penguins would walk into it, the door would close, and it would be cranked up high into the air. At the top was a platform. The birds would walk out onto it and, one by one, jump off into the water below.

Since none of them had ever had a swimming or a diving lesson, they each devised their own method of landing in the water. A swan dive or a back flip, with a belly landing, seemed to be the top choices. A clown penguin by the name of George would chicken out and refuse to dive at all.

This was where the kids in the audience got a chance to exercise their lungs. They were invited to help in calling him down, "Come on, George, come on down. Don't be chicken." Very often the older children and the parents would get caught up in the fun and join in. When George could stand the racket no longer (and the trainer cued him) he would jump off, amid cheers and a big hand. However, all that interested him was his extra helping of fish. Humans are the only animals that live for applause.

We now had this exhibition in addition to the "Zoocus," which was the title we gave our show. You take a ZOO, you add a cir-CUS, and you have a "Zoocus."

#### CHAPTER 74 ZOCUS

The program for the Zoocus ran as follows the first season: riding dogs and monkey; single traps; pigeon act; swinging ladder; dog act; web; six pony drill; double traps; and bareback riding act.

We would have liked to have added a few clowns, but the zoo directors did not think that would be dignified. We had to settle for the boy who clowned in the bareback act to furnish all of the comedy, and I noticed that the zoo directors laughed at him just as hard as everybody else did.

The show continued to improve each year, and we were allowed to buy all new wardrobe for each opening. We added new things to it as we went along.

One of the girl riders was exceptionally adaptable, and I taught her a lady principal act. (A solo act standing on a horse and doing ballet positions, etc.) We were presented with a well-trained pick-out horse. Things were going great, and we were having big crowds.

It happened quite suddenly and unexpectedly, just as our third season was drawing to a close. Someone in the office, while going through the records, happened to notice A.W.'s birthdate--he would be of retirement age on his next birthday. They sent for him to come to the office. There was nothing they could do; it was a civil service job, and that meant retirement at age sixty-five. Everyone was very upset. Without the animals, which belonged to us, there would be no more show. Shortly after we left two months later, the penguins were sent up to the big zoo; they closed the Children's Zoo, and the nursery was turned into a hospital for animals from the big zoo.

Cimmaron was big, majestic, with a perfect conformation, pink skinned and snow white was he, with big black eyes. He handled himself with the grace of a ballet dancer, yet had the fire and carriage that is characteristic of a stallion.

The first horse that I ever owned was a white stallion; the last horse that I owned was also a white stallion. The first one, Dex-

ter, I had for a very short time, the last one was with me longer than any other horse. It seems, then, a little ironical that I am always remembered in connection with a big black stallion; but this is understandable, because most all of the photos and all of the lithographs were with black horses. The one to acquire the most fame was Satan, of course. There was only one Satan--he stood alone--the greatest jumping horse I ever knew. All of the others were either rearing or high school horses, and there was a succession of them throughout the years.



Dorothy in her flashy ten gallon western hat. Pfening Archives.

Prior to bestowing on me the honor of Texas Ranger, someone had contacted the Ringling Bros. Circus, requesting a list of the horses which I was riding at that time. They did not contact me, as the saddle they were having made for me was to be a surprise.

Among the mounts that I was using at that time was one named Cimmaron. He was not one of my choice horses, but that was the name that appealed to THEM. It did look pretty on the brow band of the bridle.

A. W. had given me a white stallion as a wedding present, but since the horse already had a name and I was superstitious about changing names, we continued to call him Silver Cloud.

While working at Melody Ranch as horse trainer for Gene Autry, A. W. bought another white stallion and trained him for me. I was away, working with the Clyde Beatty Circus at the time. This horse had not yet acquired a name, so I called him Cimmaron. He turned

out to be really great. He had a most lovable disposition. I never knew him to kick, and he reared only on command. At first I drove him on the long lines; later I rode him in a high school act. In San Francisco, I used him in the bareback riding act.

#### CHAPTER 75 MAKING NEWS

The news media was always of interest to me, and I have an idea that if it had not been for my great love of horses I might have tried to enter the field of journalism. I probably would not have been very successful at it, but it might have been fun to try. The one time that I did, I had a ball.

We were playing the Police Indoor Show in Des Moines, Iowa. Their publicity staff had placed numerous ads in the local newspapers, but had been unable to obtain any write-ups, which are always a great help to any show.

I happened to be in on a conversation where they were discussing the cooperation they were not receiving and asked if I might offer a suggestion; there was a chance that I could break the ice and make the press. I had noticed, while in town, that they were in the process of installing parking meters--an innovation in that city. With some help, I might be able to attract some attention and get the interest of a reporter or two.

I dressed up in a flashy Western outfit, a throw back to the time that I was playing rodeos and needed something to wear in the grand entry. Now, the palomino stallion, Arrow, was quite well behaved as long as he was with the rest of the horses, but take him any distance away, by himself, and he became very nervous. He displayed this trait by dancing around and letting out a loud whinny every so often.

Just across from the newspaper office, which was located on the second floor, there was a very swank restaurant with waitresses all attired in cute little Dutch girl costumes. I rode up to the front of the cafe, dismounted, and tied Arrow to the parking meter. The customers who were having breakfast stared, but I paid no attention, and seated myself at the counter where they could get a good look. I ordered a cup of coffee from the astonished waitress and by the time she brought it, quite a crowd had gathered on the sidewalk outside.

At that point, a motorcycle officer (who was my partner in this little caper) arrived. He strode into the restaurant, looked all around and, in a loud voice, demanded to

know who owned the horse that was tethered to the parking meter. My Western outfit and big, white Stetson hat did not seem to offer him a clue, so he yelled out again.

By now, most everyone there was pointing in my direction. I arose from my seat and asked what was bothering him. He took my arm and escorted me to the door. Once outside, we got into a heated argument. I pointed out that a hitching post was the proper place to tie a horse. Finally, in desperation, he wrote me out a parking ticket, which I promptly tore to bits. By this time, we had gained the attention of the newspaper personnel, who were leaning out of the upstairs window of the building across the street.

Mission accomplished, he ordered me to get on my horse and follow him to the police station. Once there, we tied Arrow up in the backyard and went inside to see what might develop. We did not have long to wait as several newsmen soon arrived. The Chief hid me in his office and told them only that I would be brought to trial shortly. Officer Mihalovich and I stayed in the private office, where he regaled me with stories of some of his escapades, until noontime, when lunch was sent in to us.

Around one o'clock, I called the personnel director at the building where we were showing and told him that this little escapade was going to take longer than I had anticipated, and I might be late for the matinee. He said it did not matter, we had already had a picture in the morning paper with only a sketchy explanation, which was sure to have a follow up story on it; so take as long as necessary to complete the stunt.

Shortly thereafter I was escorted to a police car which took me to the courthouse. Officer Mihalovich was whisked away in another car. Arrow had been picked up by a groom and returned to the building where we were showing, which could have been construed as concealing evidence, I suppose, but no one noticed the discrepancy. Upon arrival we went directly to the judge's chambers. Of course, he was in on the deal also, but it suddenly occurred to him that it would be a great gag to call in another judge, who knew nothing about the conspiracy, and see what his reaction might be. He would fake a sudden illness and then hide where he could witness all of the action, unseen.

I quote now the news story as it appeared in the *Des Moines Register* on Friday, October 3, 1947:

**"Can A Horse Use  
Parking Meters Too?"**

"A blond lady and a lanky cop glared at each other Thursday in municipal court. Then, Dorothy Herbert of Houston, Texas, took the witness stand next to Judge Ralph Moore's bench. The judge peered at her solemnly as she related:

"All I was doing was going in for a cup of coffee, and I tied my horse up to a hitch-

ing post, and he came along and told me I couldn't."

"It wasn't a hitching post--it was a parking meter," put in Tony Mihalovich, a Des Moines patrolman. He was silenced by City Prosecutor Anthony T. Renda.

"Was it a parking meter?" Judge Moore asked Miss Herbert. "You mean that hitching post there?" she countered. "Do you know what a parking meter is?" asked the judge. "No, we don't have them in Texas. We tie our horses to anything there."

"Mihalovich later told his side of the story: 'I came down Locust Street and saw a big crowd. A horse was dancing around on the sidewalk across the street from the Register and Tribune building. I followed this lady into the coffee shop and told her she couldn't park her horse there--it wasn't a hitching post and, since she hadn't put a nickel in, she was parking overtime and, besides, the horse was illegally parked on the sidewalk. Then she knocked Des Moines and asked what kind of a town was this where you couldn't hitch a horse, so I gave her a summons. She mounted up and tore the ticket in half. I picked it up and told her to come to the station; we would see a judge. She rode over and I followed her on my motorcycle at about a mile and a half an hour.'

"Mahalovich lowered his voice, 'But she

didn't have a chance to drink the coffee, Judge, I'd like to be a gentleman and pay for it.' He dug for a nickel.

"I owe the city a nickel," said Miss Herbert, we're even. "You can't do that," snapped Renda. The city would be out a nickel.

"Frank McKeon, deputy court clerk, who had overheard the argument, was called as a witness. 'Miss Herbert seemed to sort of lose control of her horse,' he said.

"I never lost control of a horse in my life!" she shouted.

"At this point a light began to dawn. A smile lit up the judge's face.

"Aren't you in on this gag?" Judge Moore asked McKeon, "and isn't Miss Herbert part of the circus playing in town?"

"Matter of fact, Judge, I think she really thought it was a hitching post," said McKeon.

"We rest, Your Honor," said Renda.

"Judge Moore cleared his throat. 'I happen to know Patrolman Mihalovich has a special interest in some crippled children,' he said. 'I'm going to dismiss the charges on condition that these children be admitted free to the circus.'

"Miss Herbert smiled approval. She and the patrolman grinned at each other; Renda and McKeon appeared puzzled--they hadn't known the arrest was a pre-arranged publicity stunt either."

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The 1989 Circus Historical Society Golden Anniversary convention eclipsed all previous meetings in attendance, number of speakers, and money raised from the auction. The Columbus, Ohio gathering had something for everyone--from the most scholarly historian to the casual fan--and was five days of wall-to-wall circus.

While the activities didn't officially get under way until Thursday, 27 July, a surprisingly large number of members arrived on the previous evening to view films from the collection of the late Don Smith, founder of the CHS, which are now part of the Pfening Archives. The next afternoon the conclave began in earnest with the presentation of historical papers at the Ohio Center Holiday Inn, the convention headquarters. Richard Reynolds led off with an overview of circus elephants illustrated with slides from his collection. He was followed by Eva Amidon who presented a biography of Father Ed Sullivan, well loved chaplin of the Circus Fans Association. Ernest Albrecht next discussed his recently published biography of John Ringling North. Richard W. Flint concluded the session with a slide presentation on Currier and Ives and other printer's lithographs of Barnum's Museum. Lively dialogue followed all speakers.

That evening Fred D. Pfening Jr. displayed exactly 100 lithographs from the Pfening Archives. This was one of the meeting's highlights as the vast majority had never been shown before in public. Most of them were from litho houses other than Strobridge, and dated back to the mid-19th century. Particularly noteworthy were about thirty Ringling bills printed by the Courier Company from 1891 to about 1906 as well as a

This 1894 Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Shows Courier Co. one sheet lithograph was among those shown from the Pfening Archives.

number from smaller shows such as Scribner and Smith, Martin Downs' Cole Bros., J. H. LaPearl, and Stone and Murray.

Those who really wished to gorge them-

with a presentation on the history of early menageries. He was followed by William and Barbara Woodcock who discussed elephants and their life-long careers in the circus industry. Copeland MacAllister then delivered a short paper in which he speculated on routing practices in the 1850s. Jim Ridenour next talked about circus video tapes, which are quickly becoming a popular form of circusciana. As always, lively discussion ensued after all speakers.

That afternoon the congregation gathered at the Ohio Center, where Circus Vargas was setting up, to hear Mike Gorman, the show's advance logistics representative, talk about various behind the scenes aspects of the circus. He introduced a number of Vargas staffers who talked about their specialties and answered the members many questions. This interlude gave the attendees a greater appreciation of how the Circus Vargas operates and what needs to happen before the performance is given.

The annual circusciana auction that evening was a smashing success. Items ranged from a mid-19th century dodger for Blondin to last year's Ringling-Barnum program. While much of the material came from the Charles Simmons donation, at least a dozen members brought items. Included were such prizes as Ringling-Barnum contracts from the 1930s, the business records of the 1969 Carson and Barnes Circus, a Forepaugh program from the 1880s, and numerous 19th century newspaper ads. The huge volume of material brought in over \$5700, by far a record for this popular event and a great windfall for the CHS which will use the proceeds solely for the *Bandwagon*.

While the auction was the evening's last scheduled event, the conventioners had a special added attraction (at no extra charge) when someone set off the hotel's fire alarm

Stuart Thayer, Ernest Albrecht and Al Stencell, left to right, at the banquet.

# The 1989 CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY CONVENTION

By Fred D. Pfening III

selves on circusciana also had the opportunity to view about 100 rare letterheads from the Pfening Archives, including letters signed by all seven of the Ringling brothers, James A. Bailey, P. T. Barnum, W. W. Cole, John B. Doris, I. A. Van Amburgh and many others, all on fancy stationery.

The evening's program finished with a showing of rare films from the Bill Rhodes collection. These included considerable footage of the Ringling-Barnum and Royal American Carnival trains.

The Friday activities began with more papers. Stuart Thayer started off the session





Professionals Barbara Woodcock, Kenny Dodd and Bobby Johnson at the Saturday night banquet.

at 2:30 a.m., forcing an evacuation of the facility. Richard Reynolds was spied outside with his research notes in hand. Johann Dahlinger once again proved her worth to the society by hauling out all the proceeds from the auction. Fred Pfening III and Stuart Thayer smoked cigarettes while staring blankly at one another, each incapable of coherent utterance. Fortunately the alarm was false, and the conventioneers returned to their rooms and dreams. Contrary to rumor, Ben Kronberger did not set off the alarm.

Saturday morning the tired attendees heard Stuart Sears discuss the Hoffman Circus and display two rare turn of the century posters. John Polacek followed with a paper on marketing the Buffalo Bill Wild West. John Fugate next provided an update on plans for the Circus Hall of Fame in Peru, Indiana. The morning session ended with a presentation by Dione Arata, Circus Vargas choreographer, on how that show's production numbers are put together. Again, lively discussion and questions followed each speaker.

That afternoon the faithful gathered at the Ohio Center, which was across the street from the Holiday Inn, to watch the Circus Vargas matinee. The show treated the society to the best seats in the house.

The banquet that evening was held at a restaurant a short distance from the hotel where a fine buffet meal was served. The featured speaker was Clifford E. Vargas, founder and president of Circus Vargas. He spoke touchingly about his career and his life in what turned out to be his last public appearance. It was a festive and magical evening, full of warm memories and good fellowship in an overcrowded room. Vargas' sudden death a month after the convention gave his talk an added poignancy.

The convention ended Sunday morning.

The first speaker was Ricky Jay who gave a humorous and scholarly overview of flea circuses. He was followed by Leonard Wolen, a Vargas clown, who had the audience in tears with his witty banter as he showed how clown make-up is applied. The convention's finale was Gary "Sol" Salzer, marketing director for Circus Vargas, who discussed what went into booking and publicizing the Columbus date. Many members stayed in town over Sunday night to catch the Vargas performance again.

The turn out of about 165 was much bigger than expected. In fact, some members were unable to at-

tend the banquet which sat 154. There was ample time for jackpot cutting. The meeting was enriched by the attendance of a number of active and recently retired circus professionals including the Woodcocks, Al Stencell, Bobby Johnson, Kenny Dodd, Ray McMahon, Cherie Valentine, and George Hubler who had rejoined the society days before the meeting.

So many people helped in so many ways to make the convention a success that to list them here would double the length of this review. Suffice to say, their support was greatly appreciated by the convention committee. Two people deserve special thanks: Johann Dahlinger, who worked far beyond the call of duty, and Clifford E. Vargas who rolled out the reddest of red carpets.



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By Stuart Thayer

# JAMES HUNTER

## The Bareback Rider

One of the seminal events in the history of American circus equestrianism is the introduction of bareback riding. However, since it occurred so early in the history of the art--1822--and because the man who introduced it was in this country only seven years, it is a milestone to which little attention has been paid.

James Hunter, the man responsible, has received only the barest of recognition and is largely unknown. He was born in England of Protestant parents about 1805. We know nothing of his life prior to 1821, when we know he was employed at Astley's in London as a rider.

Stephen Price and Edmond Simpson, owners of the Park Theatre in New York City, the leading drama house in the country, bought James West's circus in 1822. It would appear that they did so to get rid of West as a rival to their theatre presentations. West had the largest circus in America at the time and by purchasing it, Price and Simpson could guarantee that it didn't perform simultaneously with their dramas. The sale was announced in August; in December James Hunter arrived from England, having been hired by the new circus impresarios.

On December 9, 1822, in Baltimore, bareback riding was presented for the first time in America. This was done at the building called the Market Street Circus.

Circus riding had begun in Astley's day as saddled riding, the horse accoutered just as he would be on the road. This gave way to pad riding in which a padded saddle blanket secured by a cinch was used. However, less talented people used a pad that was stiff, a platform on the horse's back. Women riders used these into the twentieth century. Joseph Cowell has been quoted as saying that some pads were the size of sideboards. In all of these manifestations, the horse was controlled by bridle reins, the manipulation of which restricted what the rider could do. Bareback riders eschewed both pad and bridle, the horse being in "the rude state of nature," as the advertisements proclaimed.

Abandoning the reins made it necessary for another person to control the horse, mainly to keep it at its gait. Thus was introduced the "master of the circle," or as he was soon to be called, the ringmaster.

Hunter's act was an immediate success. Of him, the Baltimore American of 12 December 1822 said: "The circus attracts

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### OSCAR & MALVINA;

OR,

#### The Hall of Fingal.

Oscar. Mrs. Parker. Peller (with a song) Roberts.  
Meredith. Tatnall. Carroll. Read.  
Fingal. Darnford. Lawrence. Blodget.  
Dresser. Tatnall. Shepperson. Mrs. Carroll.  
Rogers. Rogers. Malvina. Parker.  
Lambert. Tatnall. Mrs. Belmont, Mrs. Johnson, &c.

In which piece all the beautiful Horses will be exhibited.

The above will be performed in the HALL OF FINGAL, in which Oscar, Oscar and the whole clan are discovered at the Feast of Shepperson—Triumphant Chorus in praise of Fingal—Oscar takes leave of Malvina and goes off with Fingal to meet Carroll.

SCENE I.—Oscar and the whole clan are discovered at the Feast of Shepperson—Carroll appears on the mountain followed by Moren—He gives

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## CIRCUS.

THIS EVENING, JULY 13,  
Performance to commence with a Grand Martial Caval-  
cade.  
Clown's Act of Horsemanship, by Mr. Buckley.  
After which, the farce of RAISING THE WIND.  
Horsemanship by Mr. Hunter.  
Horsemanship by Master Collet.  
Comic Song by Mr. Kelly.  
To conclude with the Melo Drama of the FORTY  
THIEVES.

Hunter is listed in this July 13, 1827 Philadelphia *United States Gazette* ad for Simpson and Cowell. Pfenning Archives.

acts, but Hunter was clearly the leading ring performer in the country.

For periods varying from a week to two months he performed for most of the leading shows until his final affiliation with William Harrington in 1827. It was Hunter who, in Hartford in 1826, ran afoul of the Connecticut law against theatricals and was tried and convicted of "rope dancing and extraordinary feats of agility and dexterity of body."<sup>1</sup>

Hunter last appeared in America in March 1829 in Washington, D.C. with William Harrington's troupe. He was billed as "the most celebrated horseman in this or perhaps any other country," and in fact, he may have been just that.<sup>2</sup>

He returned to England and presumably continued his circus career, though problems developed. Mr. and Mrs. John Greene, whose travel diary was edited by Charles Durang, were quoted in the 24 June 1865 *New York Clipper* as saying that in 1830 they went to England and found James Hunter in rags. Their conclusion was that "through a weak mind and dissipated habits he lost all."

George Stone in his history of entertainment in Albany, reports that Hunter innocently took Benjamin Stickney's coat one night in Liverpool. Stickney, seeking to frighten Hunter, reported the theft to the police, whereupon Hunter was tried and convicted.<sup>3</sup> He was sentenced to be transported to Van Dieman's Land (now Tasmania), the vast dumping ground for England's criminals. This was the limit of our knowledge of Hunter until quite recently.

Fred Braid, the leading historian of the circus in Australia, has uncovered more on Hunter, which is the reason for this article to be written. Hunter's convict record in the Tasmanian Archives Office indicates, if we read the nineteenth-century hand correctly, that for the theft of Stickney's coat he was sentenced to three months in the Hulks, the decommissioned ships that served as jails for felons. Later, he stole some bedding from furnished lodgings and for this was transported for twelve years. Sentence was passed in the Surrey Assizes on March 28, 1842.

Twelve years seems to us to be a harsh sentence for the theft of some bedding, but

in the nineteenth century transportation to Tasmania was used as a means of dealing with the overpopulation in England. People were sent out for the theft of a handkerchief; a boy for the theft of a coin.

The record describes Hunter as being five-foot, two inches tall with black hair, a black beard and having hazel eyes. He was listed as able to read and his occupation was shown as equestrian performer. He was thirty-seven years old when he was sentenced, indicating that he had introduced bareback riding in America at seventeen.

During his stay in the colony--and we don't know that he ever left it--he was in trouble with the prison officials on several occasions. He absconded in January, 1843, and received thirty days at hard labor. He repeated the offense the next March and received another thirty days, this time in chains. He was insolent to someone in July of the same year and drew seven days solitary confinement. In May, 1845, his record was clean long enough for him to be released from the first stage of probation.

He may still have been troubled by drink, as a note in the file reads, "not to be hired in Launceston by any publican [barkeeper]." In April, 1848; November, 1848; and September, 1849, he was in trouble again and served short sentences at hard labor. In October, 1850, he again was granted a Ticket of Leave, which allowed him his freedom within the colony. On June 10, 1854, he was certified a free man and allowed to go where he chose.

Mark St. Leon, another Australian researcher, has ascertained that one Golden (or Golding) Ashton from Essex in England was sentenced to fourteen years transportation on June 28, 1836, for stealing a silver brooch and pin. Ashton, whose death certificate says his father was a circus owner in England, claimed to have been a member of Bell's circus and Batty's circus in the U. K. Neither of these affiliations seem possible to us.

The connection between Hunter and Ashton is that they were both in the same part of Tasmania as prisoners in 1843 and again from 1845 to 1848. Ashton was given his Ticket of Leave in 1846. He adopted the name James Ashton at this time. By December, 1848, he was appearing as a bareback rider, "without saddle or bridle," with Radford's Circus in Hobart, Tasmania. It is Fred Braid's contention that Hunter had taught Ashton the art of bareback riding.

Ashton went to Australia in 1849 to appear with Hay's short-lived circus at Port Philip. The next year he was back in Tasmania riding for Radford. In March, 1851, he opened Ashton's Royal Amphitheatre in Launceston, Tasmania. Among his roster of performers was James Hunter.

Hunter, now forty-five, appeared on the tight-rope and as a clown. At his benefit, April 5, 1851, he presented his bareback act

## ROYAL AMPHITHEATRE ELIZABETH STREET.

"This is the night—  
"That either makes me, or foredoes me quite."

## FOR THE BENEFIT OF MR. J. HUNTER

The Beneficiary begs respectfully to announce to the Ladies and Gentlemen of Launceston and its vicinity, that ~~the~~ Benefit is fixed for MONDAY EVENING, April 7, when he hopes to receive a share of that patronage he has so long studied to merit; the acts of Equestrianism on this occasion are of a varied and pleasing nature, in fact, Mr. Hunter feels confident that the performances on this night will far out-rival anything hitherto attempted at the Amphitheatre; the posturing will be of new and classic description, which together with Hunter's own performance on the Tight Rope will astonish every beholder. The Beneficiary trusts that on the present occasion his exertions will be rewarded in the true spirit of British liberality and that on his entering the Arena he will be able to exclaim in the triumphant words of Caesar; "Veni, vidi, vici."

The entertainments will commence with an act of Horsemanship by Mr. Ashton. After which Messrs. Carter and Palmer will appear on the Corde Volante. Tyrolean Peasants, by Mr. and Mrs. Ashton. Clown to the Circle, Mr. Hunter. Mr. Hunter the celebrated American Tight Rope Dancer, will exhibit his unrivaled feats on the Tight Rope. Mr. Mills will appear in a bare backed act of Equestrianism. Mr. Hunter will exhibit A GRAND TRAMPOLINE in which he will throw a summersault over a Garter 10 feet high over 40 mens heads! concluding by throwing a summersault through six balloons!!! Mr. Ashton will introduce his favorite pony Tom Thumb. Mr. Hunter will (for the first time here) enter the Arena, and perform a surprising act of bare backed equestrianism. The acrobatic performances of Messrs. Carter and Palmer will then take place. The whole to conclude with the Merry Millers. Sole Lessee and Manager, Mr. Ashton. Ring Master, Mr. H. B. Jones. Clown, Mr. Hunter.

Ad for James Hunter's benefit April 7, 1851 in Launceston at Ashton's Royal Amphitheatre. From the April 5, 1851 *Cornwall Chronicle*. Author's collection.

for what appears to be the first time since he was transported. He then regularly rode for Ashton in that month. Nothing more has surfaced regarding his performing career.

As for Ashton, he went on to form the Ashton Circus in Sydney, Australia in 1852, a troupe that is still before the public. As part of the celebration of the bi-centennial of Australia in 1988, Ashton's Circus toured the country under government auspices. James Ashton died January 17, 1889.

### FOOTNOTES

1. Stuart Thayer, *Annals of the American Circus, 1793-1829*, (Manchester, Michigan, 1976) p168.

2. *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, D.C.), 6 March 1829.

3. Joel Munsell, ed., *Collections on the History of Albany*, (Albany, 1865-1871) 4 vols., II; 40.

Chapter 7 Part One

# ONLY BIG SHOW COMING

By Orin C. King

## NO CURSING AND SWEARING NO GAMBLING ALLOWED

1885

John Robinson's Great World's Exposition, 10 Big Shows 10 Combined, visited Kansas early in the season and played, among others, the following towns: May 11, Wamego; May 12, Clyde; May 13, Clay Center; May 14, Junction City; May 15, Ellsworth (Matinee only); May 16, Salina; May 18, McPherson; May 19, Beloit; May 21, Manhattan; May 22, Topeka; May 27, Atchison; June 24, Seneca. Robinson's advertising car arrived in Wamego on Wednesday, April 22, under the direction of Dan W. Acken. The Wamego *Reporter* had a conducted tour of the "dandy" car and proclaimed that "if we are to judge the show by those connected with it who have been here we are perfectly satisfied." A circus advertising car was always a center of excitement and in Wamego as in towns all over the nation "Many of our people looked through the car and agree in pronouncing it a beauty."

The second advertising car was scheduled for April 29, at which time "a fine calcium light display" would be presented.

In an advertisement illustrated by a pyramid of five elephants, John Robinson told the people of Wamego of the wonders to be seen on show day, May 11.

"Grace the Tattooed Woman.

"Earth never saw the like before. ZOLA. The Female Blondin. Riding a Velocipede over a single wire, 60 feet above the heads of the audience.

"Tuila. Skating on a light wire, elevated 100 feet, and performing the most difficult feats.

"9 Female English BICYCLE RIDERS 9. In Pyramids, Somersaults from Shoulder to Shoulder, and Startling Evolutions.

"ZINI FAMILY. In wonderful and lightening Hair, Teeth and Feet Slides from the Topmost point of the Canvas to the ground.

"MLLE. ELLA ZOLU, High Wire Queen, walks blindfolded with feet encased in baskets, on a three-quarter inch wire carrying a heavy man.

"ZENOBIA. Hurled 100 feet through space by Ancient Rome's Terrific War Engine. THE CATAPULT.

Copyright 1988 Orin Copple King

"Human Daring in its Zenith. AIDA! Who dives head foremost, from the Dome of the Canvas into a net 100 feet below.

"M'LLE. ZERATE, Who at the apex of the canvas, walks, runs and dances with head downward.



Old John Robinson as he appeared in the 1885 newspaper ads of the Great World's Exposition. Pfening Archives.

"28 Female Siberian 28 ROLLER SKATERS. In their native dances, acrobatic feats and wonderful skating.

"TWILA FAMILY. Unicycle riders and skaters on stilts four feet high, performing the most startling of acrobatic and skatorial feats."

One should not believe the claims of acts "100" feet above the ground, forty feet higher than the usual tent. Another element of the advertising, the Siberian roller skaters, poses the mystery of why roller skates were associated with Siberians. Nearly every show had Russian or Siberian roller skaters. But why? Why not French, English, German, Bulgarian, Hungarian or Hasidic Jews? Regardless

of whence or wherefore, there is pleasure in "skatorial feats," even in the word itself.

The "\$300,000 Free Street Pageant," as advertised, was an impressive display, including "31 Chariots, 4 Steam Musical Wagons, 15 Mounted Trumpeters, 300 Horses, 12 Separate Kinds of Music, Female Brass Band, Scottish Bagpipers, 100 Mounted Knights, 50 Cages, 2 Steam Organs, Female Open Air Opera, 100 ponies, 8 Distinct Bands, Jubilee Troupe, Steam Calliope, 50 Courte Dames."

John Robinson always presented an interesting collection of animals, including in 1885, giraffes, sea lions, walrus, hippopotamus, taminour, an "Ox with three horns and three distinct eyes," and "Over 1,000 rare animals."

And despite all of this, feature piled upon feature, "The Price of Admission is only the same as is Charged by Minor Shows."

There are no rules for capitalization or punctuation in circus advertising.

The *Reporter* reviewed the show on the 15th:

### "JOHN ROBINSON'S SHOW.

"Like the roses, the spring rains, the frogs and such like things, the circus with all its gorgeousness has come, and, like all other pleasant things of life, has gone into the dim and misty past. Around and about the memories of a few of our 'boys' linger sweet remembrances of Miss Ida Williams, the fat woman, and Miss Argente Zorilla, the bushy haired beauty.

"It was a good day and a good crowd. the fancy work on the cages are not cheap paintings like so many shows that travel, but the finest of wood carving and gold leaf.

"The usual number of animals made up the menagerie. Among the novelties might be mentioned the giraffe, the tapir, the three horned ox, the dwarf cow, the big ox and big horse and the big hog. The ox was thin, if he had been fat he would have weighed fully 3,000 pounds.

"The entry was a brilliant and imposing spectacle and was admired by all.

"The young lady who posed as the Hindoo snake charmer was much admired both for her beauty and daring. It is marvelous how she handled those monster serpents.

"The Forepaugh family in their trapeze performing was immense. Madame Zola, the

tight rope artist, was the best we have seen. Her dive from the top of the canvas to the net in the center of the ring below, her walking the rope blind-folded, and her bicycle ride on the tight rope, were brilliant and daring exploits and won the admiration of all.

"Last but not least, we desire to mention those funny fellows who charm the boys and girls. Mr. Lolow [sic] and Mr. [unintelligible], the champion clowns of America.

"We desire also to express our obligation to Mr. L. S. Steel, for many courtesies shown."

Advertising for Clay Center on May 13, added the "Long-Haired BELMONT SISTERS, Length of Hair, 7 ft. Thickness 4 in," and gave a name to the Hindoo Snake Charmer--VIOLA.

"Robinson & Co.'s show has come and gone," according to the *Clay Center Dispatch*, May 14, "and now after the blare of the trumpet and pageantry of earth have passed away it is only fair to say that is in all respects up to popular expectations, and if anything a little more. Its agents and employees are genteel and obliging; its street parade is the best seen here, showing an army of fine horses, elegant wagons and queer novelties. The menagerie is good enough for a zoological garden and is attractive to both old and young alike. The five elephants, the yak, the lions, bears, sacred cows, zebra, mammoth ox, 'tallest horse in the world,' and 'three score and ten more' other animals that walk the earth or wade the sea, are all genuine, alive, fresh and happy. The giraffe is a sure enough giraffe, we saw it eat, touched it, and watched its strange frightened movements for a half hour. No other one animal in the immense tent attracted so much attention from intelligent persons."

In newspaper advertisements the show claimed three rings, but the *Dispatch* found it different: "The circus proper is a double-ringed performance lasting nearly three hours, and is every way worthy of commendation.

"John Lowlow, that prince of clowns, is a clown and gentleman at the same time. There are a hundred things done by the fearless Minnie Marks and Josie DeMott, on horseback, that border on the wonderful, while the actions of Zola and the Leons on the trapeze touch the line of human impossibilities. Then the Forepaugh family, the trained dogs, Hindoo snake charmer, tumblers, leapers, skaters, trick elephants, etc., etc., fill up and run over a 'program' that seems to have no beginning, no commencing and not a breathing spell from 'end to end.' Robinson & Co. certainly have the 'attractions of the road,' in this year, A. D. 1885."

It was a memorable day in Clay Center and the town marshal, Constable Murphy, and the special force of R. Shepard, Henry Avery, Charlie Taylor and John Baker

had little to do. "Though an immense crowd was in town, not an accident of any kind happened and there was but one man seen drunk during the day."

The Junction City *Weekly Union*, speaking of the exhibitions of May 14, remarked, "Robinson's Circus was on hand promptly Thursday morning, and the tent was pitched near the railroad tank on this side of the track. The town did not seem to be crowded, and yet the tent, which they claimed has a seating capacity of six thousand was filled. The circus was good, the clown varying his part from the old worn out gags to fresh and original remarks about individuals in the audience. The menagerie comprised a very full collection of rare animals. We had the pleasure of an inspection of this portion of the establishment in the forenoon under the very entertaining and instructive care of Mr. L. S. Steele. Mr. John Lowlow also took pains to entertain. These men are all greatly in love with Old John Robinson. Our Railroad Agent, Mr. Copley, says he never knew of a circus to be unloaded and loaded so quietly--that there was no loud talk or profanity, while everybody talked of the perfect propriety which prevailed about the show."

The advance, under the direction of G. W. Aiken, billed Ellsworth for May 15. The *Ellsworth Reporter* was liberal with its space and ran two handouts, one of which, purporting to be an account of the Cincinnati exhibitions, was nearly a full column long.

The day was a bad one, weather-wise, and prompted the *Reporter* to state, "The great

Josie DeMott, the somersaulting equestrienne, was a feature of the 1885 Robinson show in Kansas. Pfening Archives.



John Robinson show has come and gone. Unfortunately it was the most disagreeable day we ever witnessed in Kansas, but nevertheless, the city was filled with people, and the several tents filled to their utmost capacity in the afternoon, but owing to the continued bad weather no performance was given in the evening. John Robinson always carries a good show and a good class of people with it."

At Salina on May 16, the show was hit by another heavy rainfall. The *Saline County Journal* reported that, "The parade was made through the muddy streets with much difficulty, but was imposing in its length and make up. At the afternoon performance the tent was filled with people--a surprise to the circus folks themselves in view of the bad weather.

"In fact the circus gave only the afternoon performance, the evening performance being given up on account of the rain."

Sharing the mud with Robinson's parade, according to the *Journal*, was one unexpected band wagon: "Ober's advertising wagon, which was appendid to the circus parade, was a miracle of cuteness in the way of advertising. It was a moving panorama, with 'great bargains' very properly represented in 'all colors.' Above the car was a neat canopy, under which was seated the Salina Cadet Band."

Too much water was a problem in Ellsworth and Salina, but at the next stand, at McPherson on May 18, despite threatening clouds, the greatest problem was how to get water. The show came in on Sunday, unloaded and set up the tents. When they attempted to water the stock at a public tank the water committee of the city, headed by the mayor, refused to permit it. McPherson was not short of water, but the officials thought Robinson should pay four dollars for the privilege. The town was in an uproar, the majority condemning the government for unfair behavior. Eventually, the water committee withdrew its objections, but only after the stock had been watered at private wells. All that the commission gained from their greedy action was the privilege of being the butt of John Lowlow's jokes at the exhibitions on Monday.

Monday was payday on the show and the McPherson merchants did a brisk business. The *Weekly Press* reported that "the employees, ladies and all, spent most of their money in this city. The McPherson Mercantile Company secured the largest share of their trade in fine goods, and the purchasers were so well pleased with the bargains they got that they did considerable free advertising for the store in going through with their regular programme."

The *Press* also noted that in spite of the water problem, the mayor and the entire city government received complimentary tickets. The tent was adjudged to be "pret-

ty well crowded (at the matinee) and in the evening was over half filled."

The McPherson *Freeman* expressed the opinion that, "To say the show, both circus and menagerie, has never been surpassed here is but to state a fact observed by a large majority of those who attended."

In another column, the *Freeman* reported that, "The city received \$50 license from the circus and \$20 for two drunks, a total of \$70."

Beloit on May 19, was another struggle with mud and rain, but as in every town the show was a triumph. After the show had come and gone, the Beloit *Gazette* ran the following: "The rain commenced at an early hour, and did not cease, except a short time about noon, until after two p.m. Notwithstanding this, however, and the consequent almost impassable condition of the streets and the muddy grounds, the large tent was well filled, both afternoon and evening, and all who attended were well repaid. Everything promised was given, and the performance, from beginning to end, was good. Another feature of this show is that the managers are all gentlemen with whom it is a pleasure to do business, and always ready to fulfill every contract that devolves upon them to the letter. Messrs. L. S. Steele, business manager, John Lowlow, cashier, and Ed Holland, equestrian manager, are all jolly boys, and we can say to the newspaper fraternity that they will always find these gentlemen prompt and reliable, and ready to fully reciprocate every courtesy extended them."

Manhattan on May 21, inspired the *Mercury* to make only one comment following the exhibitions. "As is always the case, a number attended the circus last week, who are always pleading poverty when their grocery bills are presented. A gentleman, up the Blue [river], bought four tickets for his family that has been owing one of our merchants for flour over two years."

The advertisement which the show ran in the *Mercury* is unique among circus ads by reason of the illustration used. Big elephants, over-size lions, ferocious apes are expected in circus ads--but two HOGS? One, nearly as tall as a horse's back, claimed 1300 lbs. The other, waist high to a tall man, weighed a mere 1000 lbs. Strange it was, but many a farmer who could ignore Jumbo could not resist a pair of monstrous hogs.

Newspaper publicity for the Topeka date on May 22, began on the 12th with a handout in the *Topeka State Journal*, purportedly a pick up from the Cincinnati *Enquirer* reviewing the show's exhibitions in that city. Everything in Cincinnati was superlative. The performance "fairly distances all its competitors. He is particularly strong in acrobatic talent. His trapeze performers are unrivaled, and his riders, both male and female, are in the front rank of their profession, while his educated elephant,

'School,' stands alone. Before the band struck up there was a solid embankment of humanity all around the circle, and as act after act came on and went off, the stream of spectators still flowed ceaselessly inward. The entire show is filled to repletion with the most wonderful, novel and startling feats and marvelous exhibitions of athletic, acrobatic, equestrian and gymnastic performances ever seen in a circus and menagerie."

The Topeka *Daily Capital* entered the campaign with a handout published on the 17th extolling the skill and nerve of Mlle. Zola, the Female Blondin. Zola walked her wire with her feet in baskets, and at another time blind-folded, and later "trundling a wheelbarrow containing her little daughter." The climax was "riding a velocipede over the same high wire, an act that requires superhuman skill and nerve and is daily greeted by cyclones of applause from the throats of the thirty thousand amazed beholders, who gaze upon it with trembling hearts and wonder-lifted eyes." The bicycle used was a high-wheeler which most able bodied men could not ride on a smooth flat street.

A handout run in the *Capital* on show day claimed that "by actual count twenty thousand people can be comfortably seated under the vast pavilions." Thirty thousand spectators one day, twenty thousand on a different day.

Continuing, the handout made Ben Lusbie who rated a lithograph on the Forepaugh show as "The Lightening Ticket Seller and Champion of the World" for moving 6,153 tickets in one hour and three minutes, look like an amateur with ten thumbs, with the statement that, "Mr. Charles Robinson, the electric ticket seller, had his hands full, and disposed of 13,000 tickets in 31 minutes."

"Hallelujah, 'Dem Golden Slippers'" was the heading for a handout concerning a parade feature that seems strange one hundred years later. "The manner in which John Robinson introduces his band of old-time jubilee singers, now with his ten big mammoth new shows, is a novel one. They form a grand feature in the monster parade, and present a sketch of southern life never before seen north of Mason's and Dixon's line. The whole furnishes a true picture of one kind of life in the south. The troupe sing the old favorite plantation melodies as the procession moves through the streets. At Topeka, May 22."

The show arrived early in the morning on the Union Pacific in North Topeka. There was a haul of about a mile to the lot between Fourth and Fifth Streets opposite the Santa Fe station.

The *Topeka Daily Commonwealth* reported that "one of the most attractive circus parades ever given in Topeka" appeared about 10:30 o'clock.

"In fifteen minutes after the parade Kansas Avenue, which all the morning had been one living mass of humanity, was stripped of her throng and everybody went to the grounds where the large tents were stretched, just west of the Santa Fe depot. The side shows were set to grinding by this time, and the crowd was held until the big show opened at 1 o'clock, when that arena was packed from entrance to dressing room. The menagerie presented a rare collection of animals from all parts of the world, while the ring performance was excellent. The attendance in the evening was fully as large as in the afternoon."



Minnie Marks was another featured female rider on the John Robinson show in 1885. Pfening Archives.

A *Capital* reporter was given a tour of the aggregation conducted by John Lowlow, the famous clown and bill payer for the circus. Among the features of the side show the reporter found, "The largest giant in the world, standing eight feet six inches in his boots, the fat woman, weighing 750 pounds, the skeleton man from Kentucky, who weighs 26 pounds, the tattooed woman who alone is worth the ten cents admission, the midgets, Mr. and Mrs. Littlefinger, the handsomest dwarfs in the world, the long haired lady, and many other freaks, all go to make up a grand combination."

Lowlow informed the reporter that the show had lost "nearly \$10,000 worth of animals from sickness resulting in death, and several animals are now sick."

The *Capital* reporter was much taken by Lowlow as was every one else who ever met him, and devoted the last paragraph of his review to a commentary on the great clown.

"Mr. Lowlow has a history, and while he wanted the reporter to say nothing of him but all for the show, as he had won all the fame he could carry long ago, he is a show in himself, and a gentleman, every inch of him. His home is in Cleveland where he has a wife and son, the latter going to college. John has been in the circus business thirty-two years, and during that time has traveled with four companies. He says he never lost a day by sickness or otherwise, nor \$1 of salary during that period. He began the clown business

at 18 years and is now 45, spending the most of his time in the southern states, where he was raised, and where he is well known and knows everybody. He has been with John Robinson twenty-one years, and now does duty as clown at two performances each day, sees that the circus is packed away each night ready to load, and gets up the next morning bright and early to settle up with the newspaper offices for advertising."

John Robinson did not forget the unfortunates during his stay in Topeka. "There was about twenty-five or thirty of the Insane Asylum subjects in to see Robinson's circus yesterday," according to the *Commonwealth*. "They had the courtesies of the show extended to them by the circus people."

The only contribution to the news of the day make by the Journal was the statement that the show fed 260 people in one large dining tent and 57 in another.

For the Seneca stand of June 24, a local merchant entered a ticket arrangement with the great show. An ad in the *Courier-Democrat*, June 12, announced,

"A FREE TICKET

--TO--

JOHN ROBINSON'S CIRCUS  
AND MENAGERIE

TO EXHIBIT IN SENECA, JUNE 24, 1885.

A TICKET

GIVEN AWAY

--AT--

THOMAS & BROWNELL'S

--TO--

EVERY ONE

Who buys five dollars worth of Boots and Shoes before June 24, 1885."

The mention of the five dollar purchase was in very small type. There is no information on the outcome of the tie-in, but neither is there any information on the events of June 24.

The Topeka *State Journal* carried a story on October 6, concerning a tragedy that struck the show seven miles west of St. Paul, Minnesota on the Fergus Falls branch of the Northern Pacific on October 5.

The train was running in two sections when, while going up a grade, the first section broke in two and ten or twelve cars rolled backwards crashing into the following section. Five men were reported killed and thirty or forty more injured.

\* \* \* \* \*

Occasionally, there is something new under the sun, and in 1883 it was Buffalo Bill's Wild West, Rocky Mountain and Prairie Exhibition. The wild west show was a display of the skills and the sports of the scout, the hunter, the cowboy, the Indian and their interactions on the frontier. The time was rapidly approaching when the frontier would cease to exist and any such exhibition would be a backward look at a way of life that was gone. The games of the ranch hands persisted and evolved into the modern rodeo, but

## New, Novel, Interesting!

# SEÑOR CORTINA'S SPANISH-MEXICAN Wild West Show.

Will positively exhibit at Parsons Fair Grounds on the  
Afternoon of

## MONDAY, MAY 18!

Grand realistic scenes of Mexican and Mountain Life and soul-stirring perils of the distant plains, pictured by living frontier heroes, Indian fighters, brave scouts, roving Cowboys, captured Indians, cunning Mexicans,

CAPTAIN E. E. STUBBS, the Champion Wing Shot of the World

daring road agents, untamed buffaloes, stubborn Texas steers, Indian braves, huge rock walls, blooded horses, mounted Indians, Indian battles, Indian women, and the only genuine Sioux and Crow Indians and their families ever on exhibition.

Cowboys and Indians, Sham Battles and Indian Raids.

Signor Glories' Celebrated

## Mexican National Cornet Band !

which achieved such a glowing reputation at New Orleans during the World's Fair. A camp of Comanches, Apaches and Pawnee Indians and a host of other western celebrities.

Genuine COWBOYS From The Plains.

Amazing horse-back riders, casting the lasso, Mexican poniés and wild eids, and a group of Mexican vaqueros. A thrilling episode of this remarkable and immense show is the realistic CHIHUAHUA STAGE COACH ROBBERY.

## Don't Miss The Street Parade !

At 10:30 a.m. on exhibition day. General admission 25 cents. For further particulars see small bills, couriers, programmes and newspapers. Excursions on all railroads. Remember well the day and date.

## Parsons, Monday, May 18th !

The first wild west show to appear in Kansas was Senor Cortina's. It played Parsons on May 18, 1885. Kansas Historical Society collection.

the other elements of the wild west show--the attack on the wagon train, the pony express, the Deadwood stage coach--were solely the provence of the wild west show and continued in a romanticized version that made a travesty and a joke of the real events. The crowds attracted to Cody's show did not escape the eyes of other showmen and the thrilling new entertainment spread like a prairie fire.

By 1885 the wild west show had come to Kansas, but the first such performance to come to the attention of the author arrived on the scene from a surprising direction.

Cortina's Spanish-Mexican Wild West Show billed Oswego for Saturday, May 16, 1885. The show's advertisement in the Oswego *Independent* listed many events under the heading of "Grand Realistic Scenes of Mexican and Mountain Life and soul-stirring scenes of the distant plains, produced by living Frontier Heroes, Indian Fighters, brave Scouts, roving Cowboys, captured Indians, cunning Mexicans, daring Road Agents, untamed Buffaloes, stubborn Texas Steers, bucking Broncos, huge Rocky Mountain

Bears, Noble Elks, Burros, Indian Ponies, blooded horses, and the only genuine Sioux and Crow Indians and their families ever on exhibition. Cowboys and Indians! Sham Battles! Indian Races!"

The top feature of the exhibition was the marksmanship of Capt. E. E. Stubbs, billed as the "Champion Wing Shot of the World."

Another noteworthy feature was the Mexican National Cornet Band, directed by Signor Glories, which had been a highly successful attraction at the New Orleans World's Fair.

"At an enormous guarantee they have been secured for this season only," according to a handout in the *Independent*, "and will daily discourse operatic selections at our exhibition."

The show was booked at the fair grounds, matinee only, and since there is no mention of a tent it may be assumed that the entertainment was presented before the grandstand. The price was reasonable, "General Admission--25C."

C. N. Devere, advance agent, was in Parsons, May 7, and made arrangements for the exhibition of May 18, matinee only. After the show had come and gone, the Parsons *Sun* reported that, "Cortina's Wild West Show exhibited on the fair grounds Monday afternoon to an audience numbering fully two thousand people. The exhibition was novel and interesting. The feature of the show is the shooting of Capt. Stubbs. His remarkable ability with the rifle was fully demonstrated, and excited much wonder and admiration."

Cortina billed Ft. Scott for two days, Tuesday and Wednesday, May 19 and 20, but we do not know how the show was received, for the Ft. Scott *Weekly Monitor* made no mention of it following the performances.

An attack on the Deadwood Stage was a staple with all American wild west shows, but Senor Cortina presented something more rare, "A Thrilling Episode of the Remarkable and Immense Show is the Realistic CHIHUAHUA STAGE COACH ROBBERY." Another stellar feature advertised at Ft. Scott was "THE GREAT PONY EXPRESS. The most thrilling and daring expose of border life, carrying the U.S. Mail through the heart of the Indian country, jumping from pony to pony every ten miles."

All of the ads urged the public not to miss the Grand Street Parade! at 10:30 a.m. on the day of exhibition.

\* \* \* \* \*

Pullman, Mack & Co.'s Eight Grand United Monster Shows, Circus, Menagerie, Museum and Elevated Stage played Arkansas City, on May 4. The advertising indicated a program identical to the previous season--five funny clowns led by Chas. Madden, the Three-Headed Lady, the "Lady With Hair Seven Feet Long," and "Empress, the Largest and Oldest Elephant in Captivity."

A handout published in the *Arkansas Valley Democrat* described the show as "really a monster in all that the word implies," and old Mr. Siffered, as we shall see, would have sworn it was true.

The *Democrat* ran a story, May 8, concerning the gambling on the show.

**"DID UP BY THE CIRCUS MEN,  
ONE MAN HAS \$500 WORTH OF  
EXPERIENCE, AND OTHERS  
INVEST ON A SMALLER  
SCALE.**

"The circus has come and gone and many of our citizens are sadder but wiser men. As is always the case a large number of confidence men, gamblers and pick pockets follow the shows, and as a general thing find plenty of suckers who are ready to bite at their games in every town in which they stop. At least such is the case, if we may judge, by the way they worked some of our good citizens last Monday. Some invested in soap rolled up in ten dollar bills, and came out minus from five to fifty dollars each, while others tried their luck at 'three card monte,' wheel of fortune and other devices, and dropped all their loose change in short order. But none were quite so unfortunate as old Mr. Siffered, who was done up by two confidence men for an even \$500. By some means they had learned that the old gentleman was pretty well healed, and managed to get him off into a side tent, where after conversing for a time, one of the fellows pulled out a roll of bills and said he would bet that he had more ready cash than any man in town and if any one would show up as much he would give him \$100. Mr. Siffered said, 'I can.' The fellow said, 'show up then, and you shall have your \$100.' The old gentleman asked permission to go to the bank, which was agreed to, and soon returned with five hundred dollars which he handed to one of the fellows to count. After counting the money over carefully, he said, 'yes sir, that's correct,' and placed the roll of bills in his pocket and disappeared under the canvass, leaving Mr. Siffered to 'hold the bag.' Mr. Siffered immediately notified the officers of his loss, but they were unable to capture the chaps who did the old gentleman up. Comment is unnecessary, as we have no sympathy for men who will put up their wealth on another man's game."

The show played Cedar Vale on May 2, and Arkansas City on the 4th, under the Pullman-Mack title, but appeared at Wellington on May 6, with a new name--Col. Giles' World's Fair.

Col. Giles was Giles Pullman, and if one examined the newspaper advertising closely, one could find Harry Mack and his trained dogs, Empress the 102-year old elephant, and the three-headed songstress. Under the Giles title the show played, among others, the following Kansas towns: May 6, Wellington; May 7, Belle Plaine (Blown. Snow);

## THE FIRST AND ONLY BIG SHOW

Here this season, and will positively exhibit  
At Arkansas City on Monday,

**MAY 4, 1885.**

Extraordinary announcement just added, "The Wonderful Leopold Family. Be sure and see them. No extra charge."

**A GIANT AMONG ITS FELLOWS**

**PULLMAN, MACK & CO.'S**

**EIGHT GRAND UNITED**

**MONSTER SHOWS**



## CIRCUS, MENAGERIE

**MUSEUM & ELEVATED STAGE.**

Coming! Coming! In all Overwhelming Display Including, A Great  
Bear, Lions, Elephants, & Performing Cyphers of Astonishing Attractions. A Party  
of Clowns, led by the veteran CHAS. MACKER, Bare-Back Riders, Males and Females,  
More Trick Horses and Comic Donkeys; More Novel Equestrian Feats and Daring  
Acrobats; More Terrible Leaps, and Mid-Air Performances, than any Show on  
Earth, and

**THE GREATEST SENSATION OF THE AGE**



## THE THREE-HEADED LADY

A Living Human Being, with Three Well-Formed, Natural Heads, One of the Marvelous  
Wonders of the World; A LADY WITH HAIR NEVEN FIVE FEET LONG; A  
Grand Menagerie of Wild Animals, including Elephants, Lions, Bears, Foxes, and  
Coyotes in Captivity; Trained Dogs, Trained Monkeys, All kinds of Tame Animals,  
Etc., Etc.

**A Glittering, Glaring, STREET PROCESSION**

Every Day at 10 A.M. The Great Sensational and Never Before Attempted  
Mid-Air Flight. FIFTH FLOOR! Wire Acrobatics from the Ground to the  
Clouds! The Circus, Two Performative Hours, at 3 and 8 P.M. Daily  
Open at 10 A.M. and 3 P.M. Children Half Price  
One Ticket Admits to All the Combined Shows. Children Half Price.

Cedarvale Saturday, May 2, 1885.

Giles Pullman called his show Pullman, Mack & Co. early in May of 1885. Kansas Historical Society collection.

May 15, Fall River; May 16, Toronto (Blown. Mud); May 18, Yates Center; May 19, Le Roy; May 20, Westphalia; May 23, Osage City; May 25, Burlingame; May 26, Eskridge; May 27, Alma; May 28, St. Marys; May 30, Onaga; June 1, Soldier City; June 2, Holton; June 3, Valley Falls; June 4, Effingham; June 8, Centralia; June 9, Seneca; June 10, Sabetha.

For June 3, the show was also advertised for Whiting, but the day was actually played at Valley Falls.

On May 9, the *Sumner County Standard*, Wellington, asked its readers, "Did you ever see anything so thin as was the great show Wednesday?" In a different column, the *Standard* reported, "Col. Giles was the cause of attracting quite a large crowd of people to the city Wednesday, and perhaps they had their curiosity satisfied before going home.

Both sides of Washington avenue including awnings and upper story windows were crowded with men, women and children to witness the great and grand street pageant, which was about half a mile in length, the principal attraction being the vacant space between the half dozen cages and wagons. Nevertheless a large crowd followed the procession to the show grounds to witness the free exhibition. The circus was fairly patronized both afternoon and evening. Although our opinion may not accord with the majority we would just say that this show excels everything we have ever seen on the road in the line of snides. Perhaps time, experience and a little fair weather may be beneficial to the Giles Circus & Menagerie, but at present it is surely a great slam on the average circus."

In Wellington the World's Fair encountered some financial problems, and according to the *Standard*, was "compelled to cancel some of their engagements on account of some attachments being placed on the outfit while here. Everything was made satisfactory and they were enabled to ship by rail to Augusta after laying over here one day. Bad weather for weak shows. The managers had better take in a line of small towns that are willing to patronize anything that is called a circus."

The attachments may have been a factor in the cancellation of the Belle Plaine exhibitions scheduled for May 7, but the weather must also be considered as a strong element influencing the abandonment of Belle Plaine. Early May of 1885 in eastern Kansas was a time of unseasonable cold.

The *Belle Plaine News* commented that, "Col. Giles' Great World's Fair failed to put in its appearance as advertised on account of bad roads," and in another paragraph explained the cause of the bad roads.

"This city was visited on Thursday morning by a very severe snow storm. It commenced to snow about 7 o'clock in the morning and continued for about three hours, an inch or more of snow falling." The Wellington paper reported a high temperature at Belle Plaine of 34 degrees.

The *Toronto Topic*, May 8, ran a handout that was so far from the demonstrated facts concerning the stature of the show that it might be considered satire.

"There seems to be a tremendous furore created by the announcement that this famous organization is to appear on May 16th, 1885. The papers are a unit as to its many excellences, and the praise showered upon it without stint. A prominent New York Journalist declares it to be the most perfect tented exhibition on the road, and it is in every way preferable to others, because it has been built up and organized expressly for the period, and does not employ any of the bombast and claptrap manifest in all other shows. It is high toned and respectable and cleanly in every department."

After telling how careful the management was to avoid hurting the religious sensibilities of its patrons, the story continued with a description of one of the show's features, which incidentally was a hold-over from 1884.

The features this year are of the rarest and most interesting nature, notably the human leopard family, from a clime far-away east in Africa. Their habits are a study for the anthropologist and are most unusual. They live in hollow trees, caves and such rocky excavations as naturally exist in their latitude. Their food is wild honey, vegetation and an occasional diet of serpents, lizards and bugs, which abound near the Equator. They show a brown color covered with large black, shining spots not unlike the leopard. From the chin across the head to the back of the neck is a wide strip of snow-white hair fringed with a hirsute growth of black color. Their language is unintelligible and they possess great powers of strength though small of stature."

Today the description sounds like a heavy metal rock band.

Unfortunately, Toronto never got to see the wonderful leopard family, for rain, mud and swollen streams between Fall River (May 15) and Toronto proved more than the show could handle. Toronto was blown, and the show struggled on to Yates Center for the exhibitions of May 18.

Giles Pullman was in Yates Center May 5 and 6, with an army of billposters, and "pretty generally plastered the town with the flaming advertisements of this popular concern. If Mr. Pullman can be taken as an index to the character of the exhibition," according to the *Yates Center News*, "then it must be a good one, and well worth, to those who wish to enjoy a short season of fun, the price of admission."

The editor of the *News* was not disappointed in his expectations of the exhibitions, and gave Col. Giles probably the best review he ever received: "The museum is very fair in all respects, while in some of its features, notably the enormous elephant, Empress, and the leopard children, the first shown in this country, it excels anything ever seen in this part of the State. The circus is the best that has visited this city in several years, and in some of its departments is equalled by few and excelled by none ever seen in this country. The feats performed by the Alboin brothers are the best we have ever seen while those of the Wallaces, husband and wife, on the trapeze, are very good indeed. The bareback riding of Alex. Scarfer, the exercises on the horizontal bar, and the tumbling, will compare quite favorably with exhibitions of this nature seen under any canvas, while the imitable (sic) Charley Bell, the prince of jesters keeps the audience convulsed with laughter by his many made-to-order witticisms. We are indebted to him

## Wait for the Best!

Which will P's tively

### EXHIBIT AT ONAGA Saturday, May 30th

And at Soldier City, June 1st.

THE GOLIATH AND TITAN OF THE WORLD.  
BIGGEST AND BEST SHOW ON EARTH.

COL. GILES',  
**GREAT WORLD'S FAIR**  
DOUBLE MENAGERIE, EGYPTIAN CARAVAN,  
GRAND TWO RING CIRCUS  
MUSEUM OF STRANGE WONDERS AND AQUARIUM  
OF MARINE MARVELS.

ON A TRIUMPHAL AND SUCCESSFUL TOUR



Nature's Most Wonderful Phenomena, the  
**HUMAN LEOPARD FAMILY**

A Father, Son and Two Daughters. A most curious people whose dwelling place are hollow trees and caverns, and whose food is Serpents, Lizards, Bugs and Roots.

AN ACADEMY OF EDUCATED DUMB BRUTES

FEALED BY  
**HARRY MACK'S DOG CIRCUS**  
DONNELEY'S DEN OF FIERCE PERFORMING LIONS  
TROUPE OF NATIVE WILD BRONCHO HORSES  
LEON AND HIS TALKING DONKEYS  
CLOWN MONKEYS AND PORCINE COMEDIANS

And the Majestic and Tremendous.  
**WAR ELEPHANT EMPRESS**

By the end of May the Giles Pullman show was billed as Col. Giles Great World's Fair. Kansas Historical Society collection.

for unusual and special courtesies and found him a first class gentleman in every sense of the word. The management pay their bills like little men, and rowdyism, taking their conduct while here as an index, seems to be a quality unknown among the combination. We have no hesitancy in commending this concern as one deserving of success."

The *Le Roy Reporter*, speaking of the exhibitions of May 19, considered the show to be "a very creditable affair, much better in fact than most overland shows. It had experienced a terrible time in the Verdigris bottom during the recent fearful storms. The teams were almost played out, and many times, when the wagons got stuck, the large elephant was pressed into service to pull them out. For this purpose a large chain was fastened around his neck and then attached to the wagon. When the old fellow moved on 'something had to come.'"

All that we know of the exhibitions of May 23, is contained in one paragraph in the *Osage City Free Press* reporting the arrest of John McAllister, a canvas man, for stealing a revolver out of the pocket of George Sox-

man. "The circus bosses readily consented to his arrest and even promised to aid in it if necessary." McAllister was bound over to the district court on a charge of larceny.

Giles Pullman called at the office of the *Osage County Chronicle* on the 14th and placed an ad for the exhibitions of May 25, at Burlingame. The editor commented that, "Mr. Pullman is an intelligent genial gentleman and the *Chronicle* wishes him good luck in his travels."

Following show day the *Chronicle* reported that, "The Colonel Giles circus was well patronized and the people generally well satisfied with the entertainment. The company, though not large, is composed of artists of a high order in their profession. Mr. Charles Bell, the clown in connection with this show, is deserving of special mention. He is one of the best ever seen in Burlingame."

In an adjacent column under the heading "Licensed Gambling" the *Chronicle* took the city government to task for the games that flourished on show day: "On Monday, the day the circus was here, the town was overrun with various gambling devices. Of course each game was generously patronized by the big overgrown greenies that always flock to town on circus day. Indeed it is not necessary to go out of town to find the biggest suckers. Burlingame has plenty of them who are always ready to bite at anything."

"The most unfortunate thing in connection with Monday's gambling games is that they were licensed by the mayor. The *Chronicle* sincerely regrets that Mayor Huff should have done such a thing. To be sure the license may have been issued with the understanding that it was for something else besides gambling, but if so, then whenever it became evident that gambling was being practiced every license should have been withdrawn and the robbers arrested."

The *Eskridge Home Weekly* commenting on the exhibitions of May 26, thought it "strange that men will suffer themselves to be beaten out of their money the way some men were at the show on Tuesday. Some lost as much as \$25. Don't ever bet on any man's game."

Charles Bell, the clown, conducted a tour for the staff of the *Home Weekly* and the editor found that "the performances were all good." The only real news of the *Eskridge* date was the following: "Miss Idalette who attempted to walk the outside wire at the show last Tuesday, lost her balance and fell and was considerably hurt but not seriously."

James T. Johnson & Co.'s Great Western played St. Marys on May 22, getting in ahead of Giles Great World's Fair, which exhibited there on May 28. The *St. Marys Express* made small mention of either show before they came, and none at all after they had gone.

Circus day at Onaga on May 30, was pretty much a repeat of Giles' behavior at nearly

every stand. The Onaga *Journal* said that, "The show itself was as good as the average circus," and, "The attaches were a quiet peaceable set of men," and by then the *Journal* had said every nice thing about the Great World's Fair that the staff could think of.

Continuing its coverage of circus day, the *Journal* reported, "The three-headed woman was a fraud, and the leopard family not much better. But for real genuine financing for hard cash this was the best organized show outfit we ever met. Everything connected with it was run for money. There were a dozen gambling devices connected, and in Onaga they reaped their harvest. It is positively known that all of \$600 was carried out of town by this portion of showmen. Old men and boys laid down their fives and tens with as much liberality as though money grew on weeds and bushes; men whose heart would break to contribute a nickel to a charitable cause, squandered ten, twenty and even up to fifty on the monte man or the wheel of fortune, and the gamblers seemed to enjoy the sport as much as anyone."

The Holton *Recorder* charged the Giles show \$25 for two insertions of an ad two columns by the length of the page, and on June 2, Charles Bell called at the newspaper office and paid the bill, which caused the *Recorder* to state that it "found him a very pleasant and affable gentleman."

The *Recorder* noted that, "The usual compliments of pick-pockets accompanied Giles' circus to this city. Of course they found some green horns ready to exemplify the old adage that 'a fool and his money are soon parted.' But all in all, good order and sobriety seemed to prevail on circus day. There were no fights, no arrests, and no drunkenness to speak of."

In another column the *Recorder* reported that the show "was well patronized and, so far as we can learn, gave very general satisfaction. The whole management seems to be in the hands of gentlemen with whom it is a real pleasure to transact business." Once again the press failed to see the relationship between the management and the gamblers.

The show's ad in the *Recorder* listed Soldier City for June 1, and Whiting for June 3. Whiting was an incorrect listing for on the 3rd Giles' Great World's Fair shed its glory on Valley Falls.

A heavy rain on the morning of the exhibitions may have brought more farmers to town as work was impossible in the muddy fields. It was a wet spring and the Valley Falls *Register* remarked that, "Many fields are not yet planted." The *Register* mentioned that a big crowd was in town and the show was well patronized. Also, "Several parties were taken in by the circus sharpers Wednesday."

The Valley Falls *New Era* also noted the fakirs and reported that the "sharpers and sharks which followed the Giles circus, got away with between \$500 and \$600 belong-



## COMBINED RAILWAY SHOWS, Circus, Menagerie and Museum!

Coming on Its Own Special Train. Everything New!

WILL POSITIVELY EXHIBIT AT

## Pleasanton, Friday, Sept. 18th.

1000 New and Strange Novelties

### 5 FAMOUS FUNNY FOOLS. 5

Giant Men and Women! The 1,200 Fat Boy!

Thrilling Aerial Bicyclists! Grecian Gladiatorists!

### Miles Orton,

The Lionized Bareback King, and LITTLE ALLIE and BERNARD, the Infants Miracles.

THE FLYING MAN-BIRD. Thundering Trains of Gorgeous Tail-  
IIRON-JAWED FEMALE SAMSON. leus Cars!  
ALLIE AND BERNARD, Richly Robed Procisionists!  
The Midget Aerial Wonders. 500 Feet of Poisonous-Fanged Ser-  
Polar BEARS, pentes!  
From the Frozen Seas. Beautiful Shetland Ponies!  
SPANISH SPADE DANCERS, Mardi-Gras Grottoes!  
RUSSIAN FIRE-EATERS, Chinese Bells in the Street!  
The World's Champion Double and Musical Steam Organs!  
Triple SOMERSAULT LEAPERS. Native Jubilee Singers!  
THE FEMALE BLONDIN. Automatic Brass Band!  
RIDING GOATS AND MONKEYS. Prancing Russian Thorobrods and  
Four Fabulous, Extravagant Parades. Arabian Flyers!

## PLEASANTON, FRIDAY, Sept. 18

Miles Orton changed the name of his circus to the Famous Orton Combined Railway Shows for the 1885 season. Kansas Historical Society collection.

ing to Valley Falls suckers during their sojourn here."

The show itself in the opinion of the *New Era* "fulfilled its part of the contract with our citizens. The street parade was quite an imposing affair."

The Seneca *Courier-Democrat* incorrectly announced the date for the Seneca exhibitions as June 10th, instead of June 9th. The paper ran a handout purported to be a quote from the Cincinnati *Enquirer*, where the Great World's Fair had never been.

"Although we never heard of this show before, or take much stock in overland shows," the *Courier-Democrat* commented, "they certainly employ a large advertising force and have erected several large bill boards in

our city, billing our city thoroughly last Saturday." Except to mention the exhibitions at Centralia on June 8, the *Courier-Democrat* was done with the show.

The exhibitions at Sabetha on June 10 were accompanied, according to the *Sabetha Herald*, by a "gang of pick-pockets, roughs, gamblers, toughs, thugs and confidence men who finely fleeced many of our citizens. The 'now you see it, and now you don't,' presto chango man was along, and the crowd bought 'soap' of the soap man, who would give a \$10 bill for \$1, 'in your mind's eye, Fishy.' The outfit seemed to be very successful and raked in lots of 'dust' here."

In another column the *Herald* reported that, "During the afternoon performance at Giles' circus last Wednesday, Mrs. Wallace, a trapeze performer had the terrible misfortune to fall from the highest trapeze, a distance of forty feet, and struck on her shoulders. The unfortunate woman was assisted from the ring and the performance proceeded with the audience little realizing how serious was her injury. Dr. Irwin, Jr., took charge of the case and he reports Mrs. Wallace in a fair way to eventually recover, but her injury being of the lower spine is of a terrible nature.

"Her husband, who was her companion in the trapeze performance, remained with her at the Dixon house where every Christian courtesy should be extended them. The life of circus actors is hard at best, but when such serious accidents as this occur it calls for sympathy. In this case, however, it is not needed in a financial way."

Mr. Wallace considered organizing a gymnasium class while his wife was recovering, but it is unknown if he did so.

On June 25 the *Herald* was happy to report that a catastrophe struck the Giles show. The report may have been grossly exaggerated as was the journalistic custom of the times, or it may have been the plain truth, but here is no confirmation one way or the other in the Kansas press.

"Col. Giles circus has come to a bad end, having been wrecked by a cyclone at Courtland, Neb., Sunday night. The tents were torn into shreds, the wagons dismantled, the cages broken and the animals turned loose and are still at large. The little town was also torn to pieces, killing twelve persons and injuring many more. This is the story of a circus man who struck the town yesterday, and we hope the report is true if any of the killed belong to the gang of robbers who accompanied this great fraud."

\* \* \* \* \*

The Famous Orton Combined Railway Shows billed Pleasanton for exhibitions on Friday, September 18. The 1885 edition, according to the ad in the *Pleasanton Observer*, was "NEW FROM CELLAR TO ROOF, A HIGH ART AMUSEMENT MARVEL."

The show was "NOTED FOR ITS NEW DEPARTURES," and was "NOT MERELY THE LARGEST AND BEST SHOW." Fea-

tured was Mlle. Ardell, "in her terrific hair slide! Sweeping down a slender wire from the Tent Top to the Ground, a distance of fully 200 feet, suspended by her flowing tresses."

The 1885 advertisement, compared with the newspaper ads of the previous season, generates a feeling of entrenchment, as if the show were restricted in every way, the new ads being smaller, devoid of illustrations and lacking in excitement. The ad concluded with a listing of exhibits that Orton claimed were "RARE, NOVEL AND CURIOUS."

"Spanish Fire Jugglers and Equilibrists!  
"Hindoo Snake Charmers!  
"A Mysterious Spotted Leopard-Man!  
"A whole herd of East India Double-Humped Camels!"

"The Giant Black Camel!  
"The pair of Giant Emus!  
"The Giant Ant Bear!  
"The first White Mecca Sacred Camel ever imported from the stables of the Sheik!  
"The Tiny Midget Camel Dwarf!  
"Arabian Athletes and Gymnasts!"

The only handout appearing in the *Observer* urged the public to "Make up parties, and if arrangements have not been perfected, see the agent and insist upon a special train, which should be run at hours as will best suit the public's convenience. The same remark applies to steamboats, which are always ready and anxious to carry people in crowds at greatly reduced rates of fare." Since the *Observer* never mentioned Orton's show again, we will never know how many steamboats brought excursionists to Pleasanton, Kansas.

The Kirwin *Independent* raised high hopes in the hearts of Kirwin showgoers when it passed on to its readers a rumor that Sells Bros. Enormous Railroad Shows would play the town before the end of summer, at an unknown date. The *Independent* was sold on the Sells reputation and expressed the opinion that it was "a show worth seeing and while we don't encourage wasting money on cheap concerns, we are inclined to think that the pleasure seekers will get the worth of their money at Sells." The unfortunate people of Kirwin did not get a chance to see the Sells for the rumor was nothing but a rumor, and Sells did not exhibit in Kirwin in 1885.

Topeka was no luckier than Kirwin, but the Topeka *Daily Capital*, May 12, offered an explanation. "The show will not be here this season owing to the exorbitant rates charged by the Santa Fe road. This company got \$1,200 for bringing the circus from Atchison (50 miles) last summer, and claim they run a risk of having to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars for a \$100 animal if there happened to be a wreck, which is very liable to be the case."

The *Capital* cited no source for its \$1,200 charge, and, although the amount was so inflated as to be a certain error, railroads were

totally unregulated for circus movements and could charge whatever the traffic would

The Courier Company printed this herald for the Sells show in 1885. Pfening Archives.



bear. Much circus equipment was substandard in construction and maintenance, and the fear of a derailment or a wreck had a solid foundation, but the Sells train was one of the finest on the road, superior to nearly any train on the Santa Fe system, and the danger of a wreck was directly related to the roadbed and the train crew and not to the Sells equipment.

On another page, the *Capital* of May 12, reported that, "Mr. Allen Sells and wife went down to Kansas City yesterday to attend the Sells circus, which was there last night. Mrs. Tom McGrath, children and nurse, accompanied them."

Tom McGrath, a Topekan, was an employee of the Sells brothers whose duties ranged from ticket sales, reserved seats and the front door. McGrath was shot to death in a bizarre accident in 1890 while working for Fulford & Co.

Atchison saw the Sells Bros. Enormous Railroad Shows, "Now United into one vast Amusement enterprise, forming THE LARGEST SHOW ON EARTH," on May 14. As usual when playing in Kansas the press department made the most of the Sells connection with the state, claiming to be "A Kansas Collection--A Home Institution, and the Biggest Show Ever Seen In Kansas."

The program offered was nearly identical to that of 1884. Familiar names advertised were Senor Don Jeronimo Bell, Mlle. Adelaide Cordona, the Stirk family, Frank H. Gardner, Mlle. Maretta, Mildred Gardner, the Diamond Brothers, Donaldson Brothers, Romali Brothers and William Sells, plus a complete wild west contingent.

The Atchison *Patriot* failed to review the show or to compare the attendance with that received by Old John Robinson later in the month, May 27.

\*\*\*\*\*

Hunter's Consolidated Shows, quartered in Pittsburg, Kansas, opened the season of 1885 in their home town, Saturday, May 9. The Hunter brothers operated two shows, a wagon show, the Consolidated, and a minuscule railroad show. During the winter months the two shows had given performances in the Hunter Amphitheatre, but the exhibits of May 9 were under canvas.

Goodhart, a Pittsburg clothing merchant, who advertised heavily, bought 125 tickets for the opening performances and passed them out to his patrons.

The Pittsburg *Smelter* on circus day pointed out that the Hunters spent a good deal of money in Pittsburg in the course of a year and urged its readers to "give them encouragement on that account alone even were the show itself not fully up to the standard, as we are assured it is. Give Hunter's a good turnout to-day."

A week later the *Smelter* reported that, "They gave a very creditable entertainment to a fair audience in the City Saturday evening."

May 11 was spent en route, and the show opened its touring season with exhibitions in Independence on May 12. Hunter used no newspaper advertising and consequently nearly always received bad reviews. The *Star and Kansan*, Independence, handled the show roughly. "Our country cousins who came in Tuesday and waited on our streets the entire forenoon, in expectation of seeing a circus parade, unanimously voted that they had been sold. Those who came out the middle of the afternoon and saw the whole thing in a nutshell were of the same opinion."

In another column the *Star and Kansan* described the parade: "A dilapidated band wagon, containing half a dozen indifferent musicians, six bespangled horseback riders, a camel whose natural covering had nearly all been removed--probably for the manufacture of camel's hair pencils--and a masked harlequin in a dry goods box cart, attempted to make up a procession on our streets last Tuesday afternoon. It need scarcely be added that the attempt was a dismal and gloomy failure, notwithstanding the brightness of the day."

Perhaps the greatest virtue of Hunter's Consolidated Shows was revealed in a paragraph published May 23, in the Pittsburg *Smelter* which picked it up from the Girard *Press*: "Hunter's show, which exhibited in Girard last Wednesday, is not a colossal aggregation, by any means, and did not carry off much wealth; but it paid all bills promptly." The Girard exhibitions were probably on May 20, although the Girard newspapers make no mention of the date and Hunter's used no newspaper advertising.

The Cawker City *Journal* of June 17, had some harsh things to say about Hunter's exhibitions of June 15: "The circus parade, Monday, was huge affair. There was the band-wagon, the trick mule, the camel--let's see--guess that's all."

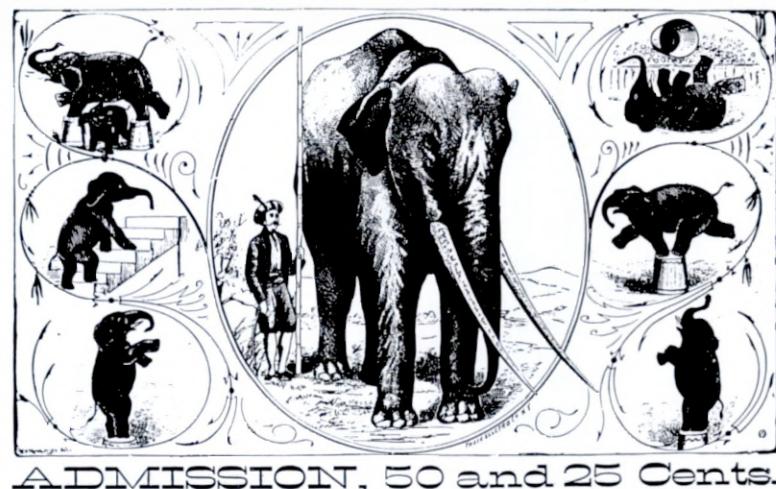
"A young man with two young antelopes struck the town Monday, and, having a better and larger show than Hunter, the latter was all broke up in business."

"The monkey belonging to Hunter's show was the best cared for animal of concern; it was gorged with oranges by one of our liberal-minded citizens. There's nothing small about a Cawkerite, only his feet."

The *Journal* summed up the day with the following paragraph: "Fraud shows have been shown up on several different occasions

The last Circus at Sabetha this Season, Hunter's Railroad Circus, at Sabetha, FRIDAY,

**AUG. 28.**



The Hunter show used this newspaper ad in Sabetha, Kansas late in the summer of 1885. Kansas Historical Society collection.

by the Cawker papers and people refuse to be humbugged by them--which explains the absence of a crowd in town Monday. A circus like the one in town Monday, which expects public patronage by parading a worn out band wagon and a blind decrepit camel will meet with deserved sad disappointment."

At the next town, Downs, on June 16, Hunter came in a day ahead of James T. Johnson & Company's great Western Circus. The Downs *Times* reported Johnson's show as "very good," but was of the opinion that Hunter, due to gambling, "should not have been allowed to stop in town at all."

The *Times* had more to say about the gambling. "The soap venders with Hunter's circus did a big business in this city. The trick of wrapping a \$20 bill with a piece of soap and then selling it for \$5 or \$10 is an old one, but there seems to be plenty of men yet who are confident they know how to catch the \$20 bill. Frank Babcock, Frank Hicks, W.W. Jones and a boy named Arnoldy invested from \$10 to \$50 and went home wiser and poorer. Arnoldy bet and lost \$50 but they gave him back \$10 and afterward Marshal Litel compelled them to refund \$25 more--all that the boy asked. These gamblers should not have been allowed to ply their trade on our streets, but men who allow themselves to be taken in by such outfits receive but very

little sympathy. It is always folly to bet on another man's game. And Briggs still continues to sell groceries (sic)."

On the good side the *Times* reported that, "The city got \$41 license fees out of Hunter's circus."

At an unknown date during the week of June 14, Hunter played Kirwin, coming in ahead of Johnson who had billed the town June 27.

The *Kirwin Independent*, after the show had come and gone, reported, "The Hunter circus that showed here last week was not favored with a very large attendance, and there is nobody to express any regrets if they did not do well. But what money they failed to make by attendance upon their show, they probably made up through thieving games, such as the same set played here last year, and such as are played around every circus, where city officers give them license. It is no use to curse the soapman without giving the city officers that license, and the fools that he takes in, their share of the censure."

The following week the *Independent* ate some of its words by apologizing to the mayor, for, due to sloppy reporting, the paper had failed to learn that when Mayor Noll discovered the crooked games he had put a stop to them.

The quick action of Mayor Noll undoubtedly prevented many "city slickers" from exploiting the "errors" of the fakirs and thereby losing their money, but in other communities there were no checks upon the "gamblers" and one begins to suspect that, considering the quality of the performance and the thinness of it, gambling was the primary objective of Hunter's Consolidated Shows.

The Gaylord *Herald* remembered Hunter from previous seasons and on June 11, while announcing the coming of the show June 17, the *Herald* warned its readers of the perils of the fakirs: "Hunter & Co's circus is billed to show at this place next Wednesday. This is the same outfit that everlastingly skinned out people last summer, and if they do it again we shall be just a little surprised. If there is still a man in the county who can be taken in on 'soap games,' etc., we will send him the *Herald* a year free and print his name in the paper in black type every week in the year."

The day after the exhibitions the *Herald* noted that, "Johnny Brents dropped ten dollars on a 'sure thing' yesterday. It proved to be a sure thing to the other fellow."

The Pittsburg *Smelter* reported the opening of Hunter's second show--Hunter's Rail-

road Shows--in Pittsburg on April 20: "The performance given by Hunter's, Monday evening, is spoken of by those present as excellent and deserving of a much larger patronage than it received. In some respects we think Pittsburg hardly does justice to her home things, and we hope when the show comes back it will be greeted with a full house."

In another paragraph the *Smelter* commented that, "Hunter's show started out Tuesday morning in the rain. It was not a very nice day to start but we hope they may meet such financial success that such small things as rains won't count."

There was no mention of gambling in the *Smelter*, but Hunter's, like many other shows heavily into graft, valued their home town reputation as solid citizens, upright and true, and saved their crookedness for the benefit of strangers.

The only report in the *Belle Plaine News* for the exhibitions of May 20, concerned the gambling: "We had no idea that there were so many in this city and vicinity that could be taken in by 'fakirs' following a show. It is safe to say that the four parties with Hunter's circus took away over \$500, and some of it hard earned too."

For Seneca on August 26, Hunter's Railroad Circus ran an ad in the *Seneca Courier-Democrat*. The advertisement was four columns wide by perhaps six inches deep and consisted mainly of an illustration depicting a steam engine, horse-drawn, such as those used by big city fire departments. "To be seen with Hunter's Show. Admission to the Entire Entertainment only 25 Cents. The Only Big Show that Ever Exhibited for 25 Cents."

At the top of the ad was the claim "The Last Circus at Seneca This Season. HUNTER'S RAILROAD CIRCUS WILL EXHIBIT AT SENECA, WEDNESDAY, AUG. 26." The entire text of the ad was contained in the two lines of type, one above and one below the illustration. There is no information on attendance or gambling.

The show played Sabetha on August 28, but aroused no comment in the *Sabetha Herald*.

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On May 26 the advance crew for King, Burke and Co.'s Great American Allied Shows, Museum and Trained Animal Exposition papered Pittsburg for the exhibitions of Tuesday, June 2. The aggregation's advertisement mentioned,

"An Extraordinary Convocation of Skilled Arealic Talent."

"1000 Rare Animate and Inanimate Curiosities."

"The Happy Family Consisting of a large number of foreign and domestic animals living in harmony together."

The only specific was the announcement that, "Prof. MORRIS' SILVER CORNET

peared in a handout the *Smelter* carried May 23.

"KING, BURKE & CO.'s GREAT ALLIED SHOWS.

"The popular cry of low prices is answered by the celebrated show, with the above title, which is to exhibit at Pittsburg, Tuesday, June 2nd. This show, while it has greatly augmented its attractions, has reduced its admission price to twenty-five cents, and, as it is the first big show to make this reduction, its patronage will only be limited by the capacity of its canvases. But King, Burke & Co., have not only made this reduction, but they have greatly added to their already large show, and have engaged such notable performers as the D'Alma Family, Millie Toina, the celebrated high-wire artiste and running globe performer, Mlle Georgia, the female Sampson. They have combined with their other exhibitions an extensive Museum of living curiosities, many of them never before exhibited."

On May 30, the *Smelter* ran a quote from the *Xenia Register*. "The small price of (25 cts) admission charged by King, Burke & Co.'s Great American Allied Shows, which exhibited in Xenia yesterday is not at all commensurate with the amount of genuine wholesome amusement that is given."

For Girard on June 3, the "Greatest 25 cent Show on Earth" added a few features to its newspaper ad in the *Girard Herald*. Added was "Chas. Carlo's Wonderful Troupe of Andalusian Stallions and Pigmy Ponies"; "the wonderful illusion of Psycho, the Mysterious Mechanical Wonder, Challenging all comers to a game of Dominos or Cards"; and "THE FOUR LONG HAIRRED SISTERS, whose extraordinary Wealth of Hair reaches and trails along the ground."

Several paragraphs of advertising appeared in the news columns of the *Herald*: "The show advertised in this issue has the reputation of being as interesting in its performance as many of the larger shows, yet they only charge 25 cents admission so all can attend regardless of the dull times."

"Do not forget to go to the show. Remember the price is made to suit the times. It is not often that you can see so much for twenty five cents."

The only report following show day is the following from the *Herald*: "A mule team employed by King, Burke & Co.'s circus to pull against the 'strongest woman in the world,' became frightened at the Gulf engine, threw the occupant out of the buggy to which it was attached, then crossing the Frisco track near Allen's hay shed, they made a circuit of about two miles recrossing both tracks. The last seen of them from the depot they were returning in the direction of town from the south. No serious damage to either mules or buggy."

Research funded by grants from: Wolfe's Camera Shops, Inc., Topeka, Kansas and First National Bank of Kansas, Topeka.

## Greatest 25ct. Show on Earth!

**KING, BURKE & CO.'S**



## GREAT AMERICAN Allied Shows

**MUSEUM**

—AND—

### TRAINED ANIMAL EXPOSITION.

Embodying the Greatest Variety of Attractive Recreation of any American Combination on the road.

WILL EXHIBIT AT

**Olathe, Saturday, June 6th.**

### AN EXTRAORDINARY CONVOCATION OF Skilled Arealic Talent

Associated with an Attractive Display of LIVING and NATURAL WONDERS, and an Exhibition of the Most WONDERFULLY EDUCATED ANIMALS in existence. Acceptably Presenting a CANVAS ENTERTAINMENT of Fresh Features in a new and Pleasing Form.

1000 Rare Animate and Inanimate Curiosities!

### THE HAPPY FAMILY,

Consisting of a large number of foreign and domestic animals living in harmony together.

Prof. MORRIS' SILVER CORNET Band will parade just previous to the Afternoon Exhibition, in their Beautiful Chariot through the Principal Streets.

REMEMBER

One Ticket Admits to Both Pavilions.

**ADMISSION 25 CENTS.**

King, Burke & Co.'s Great American Allied Shows Museum and Trained Animal Exposition, Greatest .25 Show on Earth, used this newspaper ad in Olathe, Kansas in May of 1885. Kansas Historical Society collection.

BAND will parade just previous to the afternoon exhibition, in their beautiful Chariot, through its principal streets."

The names of individual performers ap-

# CIRCUS LIFE AND ADVENTURE OF ADAM BARDY

Adam Bardy's new, revised book now includes 166 pages of interesting reading, as he tells of his life with the circus and of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus tent fire during the summer of 1944, when the big top went up in flames. Adam vividly describes the very start of this devastating fire which took the lives of more than 100 people on a summer day in Hartford, Conn. on July 6, 1944.

Also included in this book is the story of Adam's years of circus life, followed by his life as a bootlegger that started in the Kentucky mountains. Adam describes the State Police raid, when he es-



caped and spent the next seven years as a fugitive. He tells of his "boxing days" while traveling with the Coleman Bros. carnival in the 1930s, as well as his life with the gypsies, where he learned the art of fortune telling. Many more fascinating experiences of Adam Bardy's life round out this volume.

For those that like to remember the good old days, here is a book full of interesting reading. Adam Bardy's true story of wonderful years gone by.

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